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ALL ROUND THE WORLD;

OR,

WHAT'S THE OBJECT?

BY

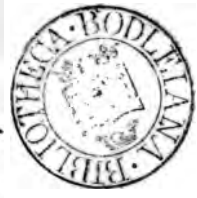
FRANK FOSTER,

AUTHOR OF "NUMBER ONE, OR THE WAY OF THE WORLD," "A JOURNEY OF LIFE," "FIVE DRAMAS," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.





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PREFACE.

IN this beautiful world of ours, that contains sufficient of everything for all its inhabitants, there are many *wants.* The want of money on the part of those who have none, and, on the part of others, the want of knowing how—*properly*—to dispose of the money they possess, are not the least among worldly wants. Yet amid a variety of objects observable in the life of man, there is usually a *leading one.* The characteristic personification of three of these

is the aim of the present novel. The ideals are founded on the *love of money*, the *love of science*, and a *love* more precious, if not more profound than either.

A desire to place these features before the reader, through simple, yet truthful sketches of human nature, is the present and chief object of the

AUTHOR.



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ALL ROUND THE WORLD.

CHAPTER I.

THE MERCHANT AND HIS FAMILY.

"NOBODY about here?" inquired John Stone, the great merchant, on his unexpected return from the city at noon.

Before the servant had time to reply, the inquisitor in his usual stern and impatient manner continued his queries.

"Where's Maria? where's Ruby? where's Ernest?"

"Miss Maria is in the bedroom with her mamma."

"Well?"

"Master Ruby is in his study, and Master Ernest is gone for a walk."

"Doctor been?"

"Yes, sir; and he has only just left."

"Did he ask for *me?*"

"He asked if you were at home."

"Did he say anything about your mistress?"

"Yes, sir: he told Mrs. Bland she was much the same."

"Ah!'

And, after throwing on the table a newspaper he had in his hand, the merchant proceeded to visit his wife, who was seriously, if not dangerously, ill in bed. At the close of that visit John Stone again returned to his business in the city.

"What did papa mean by saying he should have remained with you longer

had it not been the fourth of the month ?" inquired Maria, as her parent hastily left the house, entered a cab at the door and drove off.

"Merchants, my dear," replied the invalid despondingly, "have important money matters to transact that require their personal attention at the early part of the month."

"Then it is an unfortunate thing for a merchant's wife to be unwell at the beginning of a month, is it not ?" said Maria.

"Surely, my child," replied the mother as a smile enlivened her pallid features, "it is not a *fortunate* thing to be ill at any time ? But your papa's unabated ardour for what has been the chief object of his life is equally unfortunate for himself. Doctor Truman has often told him that

another attack of his old complaint might prove fatal at any moment."

"Through over anxiety, I suppose?" said Maria.

"Yes: and the want of proper relaxation," added the invalid.

"I dare say then it is this that often makes poor papa so very cross?"

"No doubt of it, Maria. Anything that seriously injures the constitution is sure to affect either the mind or the temper in some way or other."

A loud double knock is heard.

"Oh, that dreadful sound! Something must be done to the knocker," continued the invalid. "I am not prepared to receive any visitor to-day, except our kind and venerable pastor. But when you go down, my child, request Mrs. Bland to write to her daughter, Rosa, in order that

she may come home from school for a day or two, as I should like to see her while my strength is equal to a little quiet conversation and advice."

"Dear Rosa! I shall be so pleased to have her at home for a day; and won't her mother be delighted? Of course, mamma, you remember your promise?"

"What promise, my child?"

"That you would fill in for me that which is at present a blank in their history. And you will do so when you get better, won't you?"

"*When* I get better. Did I say *when?*"

"*I* said so, mamma."

"Then, without trusting to what is, at best, a very doubtful period, I will fulfil my promise *now*, Maria."

"But so much talk, my dear mamma,

might fatigue you. Would you not rather try to sleep again, and I will sit by you till you wake ?"

"No, dear, no : not just yet. In half an hour I am to have a little beef-tea, and after that I may possibly doze again. Well, Maria : you remember Mrs. Bland when, as Miss Stanley, she was your governess before you were eight years old ?"

"And that, mamma, is all I *do* remember."

"From that period to the time when your acquaintance was resumed a few words will be sufficient to furnish all I can tell you, and all you can desire to know. Miss Stanley left us to get married. Being an orphan and without money, the friends of the bridegroom turned their backs on both. In a little more than

twelve months the husband died and Mrs. Bland became a widow and a mother at the age of twenty. For seven years I lost sight of her. Without friends she suffered many privations, yet she was too proud or too independent either to make her trials known or to seek those whose love for her would have rendered the aid she stood in so much need of. You know the rest. By a fortunate accident she was discovered and, after a while, induced to become my housekeeper and companion, while her gentle daughter Rosa, with her imperfect education, we at once sent to school."

"How very strange, and yet how very fortunate, that you should have found her again," said Maria.

"I trust, my dear child, it may be equally fortunate for you, though God only

knows what may be in store for either of you in the future. I have every confidence in poor Mrs. Bland."

"I am sure you have, mamma, for you can't bear to have any one else near you."

"*No one* else, did you say?" tenderly and with an affectionate glance inquired the mother.

"I mean no one else except your own family; you know that's what I mean, mamma."

"Kiss me, Maria."

The request was more than once complied with.

"Your papa has little partiality for other people's children: yet for *my* sake he has always treated Mrs. Bland and her daughter with proper consideration, and for *my* sake he may continue to do so. Changes in the household may hereafter

take place; but when I am gone, as I soon may be,—"

The speaker was interrupted for a moment by Maria's audible sobs.

"Your late governess will prove as kind to you as she is to her own daughter, and I am sure, my dear child, you will always respect and honour her for the great attention she has paid to me."

"You know, mamma, that I *do* love her very much," continued Maria still weeping. "But you know that she is not like one's own dear—"

"No, my child; but she will prove a mother to you in all but the name. It will be hard, very hard to part, yet that parting must some day come, and I feel—yes, Maria, I feel that the day is not far distant."

Mrs. Bland entered the room with a little beef-tea for the patient at the moment Maria was overwhelmed with grief.

"Painful in the extreme," said Mrs. Bland in a low tone of voice. "Maria, dear, you will not only make yourself ill, but you will make your poor mamma worse than she is. Do leave the room, there's a dear child. I have now completed my household arrangements for the day, and will bring up my needle-work almost immediately. Your friend, Miss Faithful, is waiting for you in the dining-room."

"I would rather not see *any one* this morning," replied Maria.

After a little more persuasion, the distressed girl left the room, and Mrs. Bland proceeded in her endeavour to comort and compose her patient.



CHAPTER II.

THE FAMILY GUARDIAN.

TWELVE months have elapsed since that day when a certain millionaire, on his return home from the city at noon, would have remained longer than a few minutes with his sick wife, "had it not been the fourth of the month."

In a well-known cemetery in one of the suburbs of London a marble tombstone marks the spot beneath which lie the mortal remains of John and Mary Stone, the late wealthy merchant and his wife.

Like their earthly career, their establishment is closed, and their children, Maria, Ernest, and Ruby, at the respective ages of eighteen, twenty, and twenty-two, are under the guardianship of Colonel Stone, the only surviving brother of the late merchant.

A childless widower and brave soldier, the Colonel is himself a wealthy man. He acquired his riches not by valour on the field of battle, but by the valiant conquest of a woman's heart. And the fair possessor at her death left the large fortune she had inherited in her own right to one whom she considered had established the strongest claim thereto—her husband.

To this brother the late merchant has left many additional cares. He has left him the care of fifty thousand pounds for

himself. He has left him the care of three grown-up children. He has left him for a time, under certain conditions in his will, the sole care of his immense fortune, while the cares involved in the onerous charge of the living ones happen to be greater than all.

Seated at breakfast with his nephews and niece in his splendid mansion in Belgrave Square, the Colonel one morning began a conversation that embraced many important and a few startling announcements to those immediately concerned.

"*Another* five-and-twenty for instruments?" said the Colonel in answer to a desire expressed by his nephew, Ruby. "Science is rather an expensive hobby, It's barely a fortnight ago that you *had* five-and-twenty."

"I know that," was the short and rather

sharp reply. And the declaration that followed betrayed Ruby's annoyance at the uncle's reminder on the subject. "Had you given me fifty a fortnight ago, it would have saved me the nuisance of a second application."

"The *nuisance*, eh?"

This was delivered in a style clearly showing that the family guardian and at least one of his many cares were not on the most affectionate terms.

"I call it a confounded nuisance to be thus compelled, as it were, to beg for a morsel from one's own monetary cupboard. It's something beyond my comprehension. I can't understand it."

"Can't you?" said the uncle. "Then, sir, you have yet to recognize in our social relationship a simple fact that has altogether escaped you in your scientific hobbies,

theories, or studies, or whatever else you may please to call them. Without any solicitation on my part, the key of the monetary cupboard, as you term it, has for a while, been placed in *my* keeping."

"I know it," replied Ruby. Then, with a sarcastic smile and disdainful look, he added, "I also know that although there are bones in that cupboard on which there are some good pickings, I shall often have to share the fate of Mother Hubbard's poor dog, and be compelled to go without one."

At this juncture the reader must be informed that the will of John Stone was a very remarkable one. If the children contracted marriages approved by their guardian, or lived a steady unmarried life up to the age of thirty, they would be entitled to their respective fortunes. But

if either married without the approval of the trustee, the fortune—except sufficient to yield the delinquent three pounds a week—was to be forfeited and go towards the cost of any expedition that might be formed to search for undiscovered regions for the extension of English commerce.

"Grave responsibilities have been imposed on me," said the guardian in his usual decisive and unbending manner. "In regarding them with a jealous eye, I may occasion regret, disappointment, or even anger. I can't help that. Neither pleasure nor pain will prevent the faithful discharge of my duty; and, in presence of all, I now tell you that I intend to have the conditions of your parent's will strictly fulfilled—yes, fulfilled to the very letter."

Ruby, as senior spokesman, after an

inquiring glance at Ernest and Maria, and evidently annoyed that the subject of his present monetary want had been evaded, said, "We never for a moment doubted your intention."

Ernest remained silent, and Maria attended to the duties of the table, by refilling the coffee cups.

"Well, uncle," continued the nephew sarcastically, "I find the conditions of the will lie between matrimonial strife or felicity, as the case may be; or a state of single blessedness as the case—without money—is not likely to be. Will you, if you please, uncle, be so good as to tell me what kind of amazon would be likely to pass examination by our rigorous scrutineer?"

Without replying to the observations of his nephew or allowing a muscle to be

disturbed by their tone, the uncle coolly buttered another piece of dry toast. Ernest and Maria had some difficulty in preventing their smiles launching out into laughter. The Colonel it is said was never known to laugh, except at the moment he lost his left arm* on the field of battle.

"It's settled!" added Ruby whose anger was increased by the absence of any promise from his guardian concerning the immediate want of five-and-twenty pounds. "If I can find a willing damsel for 'a leap in the dark,' I'll marry to-day and apply for a divorce to-morrow."

After swallowing the remainder of his

* Below the elbow, but the artificial substitute, including the hand—always enclosed in a glove—was so well executed that strangers were unaware of the loss of the warrior who, as a sportsman, was still an excellent "shot."

coffee, the disappointed nephew hastily left the room.

"Wit without wisdom," drily observed the colonel. "A little military training may be useful. It will teach him to respect the sage old proverb that declares 'discretion to be the better part of valour.' Let that pass," he continued, on turning to nephew *number two.* "Now, Ernest, I am glad to say that *your* applications for money have not been quite so frequent as those of your brother."

"No, uncle: for the simple reason that I knew they would not be granted," replied Ernest, who was less excitable than Ruby, but equally humorous.

Colonel Stone always evaded or passed in silence any observation, or anything else, that appeared too clear to be questioned or too strong to be contested.

"Give me another cup of coffee, Maria. I have *something* to say to your brother Ernest presently," significantly observed the guardian.

"I hope, uncle, it's something good," replied Ernest. A spoon that fell from the table to the floor seemed to suggest a further remark from the nephew. "I have heard people speak disdainfully of those who are supposed to be 'born with silver spoons in their mouths,' as if the poor innocents at their birth had any hand in putting them there, or as if their detractors would not gladly have put them into their own mouths if they had been able to do so. Now, we who were born with spoons in the mouth are prevented, except under certain conditions, even from making use of them. Compelled to be infants in maturity, the grown-up babies must still be fed by the

nurse. I mention this not by way of complaint, but simply as a misfortune."

"Ernest Stone!"

This was pronounced by the uncle with such marked emphasis, and accompanied by a look of so much gravity, that both the bearer of the name and his sister were as convinced of a coming surprise as if they had already felt the first big drops that precede a thunder storm.

"I am about to question you on a subject of serious import." The speaker here drew from his pocket a letter in a lady's handwriting. "As a rule, an anonymous communication is unworthy of notice, and should be treated with contempt. It *may* be so in the present instance. I have never, Ernest, had occasion to doubt your veracity, and should you deny the allegations contained in this epistle, I will at once commit the

document to the flames, and bury the subject in oblivion." Throwing the letter across the table to his nephew, he added, "read that. You will see that the writer states how my nephew, Ernest, has formed an attachment for a girl with a very imperfect education—the daughter of a poor widow. Neither the names nor whereabouts of either are mentioned; but if the first statement be true, you can of course supply the deficiency, as you must be familiar both with the name and abode of these poor people?"

A considerable pause ensued, and during the time the epistle was silently read and re-read both by Ernest and his sister, the speaking glances of both were keenly observed by their guardian. Ernest at length broke silence.

"I suppose there is no great crime

in forming an attachment for poor people ?"

"That's not the question," emphatically replied the uncle. "The question is, has an attachment, such as that stated in the letter, been formed by my nephew, Ernest Stone ?"

Ernest made no reply.

"The absence of a denial settles the point," said the uncle. "There must be some truth in an allegation that cannot be refuted. My duty is now clear. Ernest, you are not more than twenty years of age."

"Yes he is, uncle," interposed Maria. "Ernest will be twenty-one in November."

"And this is April," continued the uncle. "A few months either way are immaterial. You are aware that through the exclusive

habits of your father you have seen little or no society? That's a misfortune."

"For which, I presume, I am not responsible?" said the nephew.

"Certainly not," replied the uncle.

"I'm glad of that," added Ernest. "Otherwise I might be held responsible for that absent spoon that was part of my birthright."

Ernest, not unknown to his sister, had formed, or imagined he had formed, a *lasting* attachment for Rosa Bland, daughter of the housekeeper in the establishment of his late parents. His sister's regard both for the widow and daughter was unbounded, and the anonymous letter was suspected to be in the handwriting of a young lady visitor.

"Of course, Ernest," continued his guardian, "you have had no opportunity for

observation beyond a very limited sphere. But high attainments in human nature, like merit in works of art, can only be judged by comparison, and those who have never been acquainted with desirable objects are very apt to place a false estimate on undesirable ones. I would advise you to well weigh this matter before you place your fortune in jeopardy. I'm bound by the conditions of your father's will. Now, for a young man of brilliant prospects to rush into a matrimonial alliance with some penniless girl of mean origin is simply to marry the entire family, and poor families, you know, are usually very large ones."

"If there be an exception to every rule, I suppose there must be one in the family way," said Ernest with a smile. "But I am not aware of any matrimonial rush on my part; and you are well aware, uncle,

that I usually adopt a quieter—I was about to say a more modest course—than my gifted brother."

"Be that as it may," continued the guardian, "a quiet course in the wrong direction might lead to a hasty step in the end. To prevent this, and to enable you to gather wisdom through a knowledge of the world, your absence from London for a couple of years would be very desirable."

"Very good," exclaimed the nephew in a sarcastic tone. "I shall have no objection to drink to 'absent friends' for a couple of years, or even for a day or two longer."

"Don't say that, Ernest," interrupted his sister despondingly.

"Yes, Maria, if uncle will give me money enough, I'm quite ready to go to Merrymache, or to any other part of the world."

"I have no wish for you to go beyond the United Kingdom," continued the uncle. "You shall have ten pounds a week for expenses, and in return I shall simply require an occasional letter through which I may be able to judge of your progress in obtaining a knowledge of the world." The speaker rose to leave the room. On reaching the door he again, in a solemn strain, addressed his nephew. "Ernest, I advise you to well consider my proposition, together with the assurance that its acceptance would prove to be for your future welfare."

The adviser now left the room.

"Well, Maria," said Ernest to his sister.

"Is it *well*, Ernest?" inquired Maria.

"Ten pounds a week for a certainty will surely be better than an uncertain ten

pound note once in a blue moon. Seven pounds a week will be ample for my own expenses, I'm quite sure of that," said Ernest.

"And what do you intend doing with the remainder?" inquired his sister.

"I thought, Maria, you might have guessed my intention as quickly as it was conceived? Rosa must remain at school, and the mother must have the means of keeping both herself and scholar. Don't you think, Maria, that three pounds a week will be sufficient?"

"If not, I am quite certain I shall not require anything like the hundred a year that I am to have for 'pin money.' I could spare nearly all of it; and I *would* spare it all, rather than dear Rosa or her mother should want," said Maria.

The subject was ultimately settled be-

tween an affectionate brother and sister, but settled in the absence of the widow and her daughter.

It is with the utmost difficulty, and not without many tearful entreaties, that Maria can induce Mrs. Bland to listen to such a generous proposition. But tears and entreaties prevail, and the offer is at length accepted.

The only definite love pledge concerning the future is confined to Rosa's promise not to favour any suitor, should one arise during the wanderer's absence; and that, at the end of the two years' probation, each shall be free to adopt any course that circumstances or the dictates of the heart may suggest. Beyond this agreement, it is understood that the whole affair is to be held sacred, and considered strictly confidential by the four cautious heads and warm hearts that have

taken part in the first act of a little social drama.

Ernest Stone now prepares himself for that lengthened tour through which he is expected to gather wisdom, by obtaining a "knowledge of the world."



CHAPTER III.

AMATEUR SCIENCE IN DEVON.

CORNWALL, with its rugged coast, its fine harbours, its varied scenery, and its early historic associations, is perhaps less known to the great majority of Englishmen, than any other part of the United Kingdom. This may be accounted for by its distance from the populous cities and great manufacturing centres. It is beyond the beaten track of the multitude. But to the antiquarian or scientific student, the county of Cornwall, with its interesting relics and druidical re-

mains, is a favourite field for research and instruction.

"Well, Charles," said Ruby Stone to his travelling companion, "I shall remember our first month in Cornwall as one of the most charming periods in my life."

"You *might* have said up to the present time of life," replied his friend. "We may surely, at the age of two and twenty, venture to hope for a few still more charming periods in life ?"

Charles North was an old schoolfellow who had accompanied Ruby through Cornwall, and was now on his way home, compelled to part from his friend in Devon.

"I should like amazingly to be able to erect an observatory on some suitable spot in Cornwall," said Ruby. "But you're aware of the terrible fix I'm in ? Even science, so marvellous at each successive

stride, can't get on without cash. I should have no objection to remain a bachelor to the end of my probation, but then—like some remote region without gas—I must be content to remain eight years in the dark for want of money."

"It's a hard thing," remarked Charles.

"It's a cruel thing," said Ruby. "But what's a young fellow to do?"

"Were I in your position, Ruby, I'd drop science and turn my attention to another subject for a while."

"Another subject?"

"Yes; I'd dive into the social department, till science, in bridal attire, could be picked up as a rich dowry at the altar. But I must be off, or the coach will be off without me; so for the present farewell!"

And so they parted.

Ruby had never sought the society of

ladies. He had other and more attractive objects at a distance.

> "Let poets paint fair women as they please,
> Science for me hath greater charms than these."

Yet the scientific amateur was now brought into close contact with a mortal luminary by mere accident. Rambling in a secluded part of the north of Devon, he saw a young lady and gentleman thrown from a gig through one of the wheels of the vehicle coming off. In a moment the young lady was lying on the ground in a state of insensibility, while the gentleman escaped with a few slight bruises. Running—as any young man with a spark of humanity would be sure to run—to offer his services on such an occasion, Ruby assisted in carrying the young lady to the nearest roadside cottage. After taking the horse from the disabled gig, and throwing off some of the harness,

he doubled up the reins into a convenient length, and galloped off to the nearest town for medical aid.

A practitioner of local repute at once repaired to the scene of the accident, while the informant was induced by feelings caused through a gallop of five miles on the *bear* back of a horse to send the animal home by a man he engaged for that purpose.

"Nothing very serious."

Such was the report received by Ruby on the return of the messenger by whom the horse had been sent back. But when, after the lapse of three hours, the surgeon had not returned to his surgery, the inquirer began to suspect some serious mistake in the verbal message from the cottage. In order to confirm his suspicions or dispel his doubts on the subject, Ruby, without

further delay, proceeded to the region of the disaster.

Everything and everybody had vanished from the scene—at least, everything and everybody connected with the accident. The cottage remained; ditto the female inhabitant, ditto her daughter, and ditto a little child. All else—the insensible young lady, the disfigured young gentleman, the damaged gig, the noble horse, and the medical practitioner had all, like some passing or momentary cloud, entirely disappeared. No wonder. There was little either in the cottage or family of the Babbs to delay the departure of anyone not too insensible or too far gone to quit the spot.

"Well, Mrs. Babb—that's your name, I believe?" said Ruby to a woman of jovial appearance who stood at the cottage door.

"Kall me *missus*, if *yu* plays, zer," was

the reply. And the words were accompanied with that silly or inebriated kind of smile that betrayed a foggy state within, together with an outward sign that the speaker was anything but a good templar. "Betty's my name, zer,—Betty Babb. Nobady kalls me *missus* down yer, an everybody knows Betty Babb, I can tell e'. But I don't know *yu*, zer."

"I merely came to inquire whether the young lady who was thrown from the gig this morning was not seriously injured?"

"If her was her zune come'd to herzel, an the dacter zune druv'd her off, an as zune as they got on the wail a' tother trap, her swaitairt, if he be her swaitairt, zune druv'd off *tu*. But they'm rale gintlefolk, I can tell 'e," said Betty Babb.

"Do you happen to know their names,

or where they came from, or where they are gone?" said Ruby.

"I didn't yer 'em zay, but I baint zure they did'n zay zumat 'bout theirzels to my daghter, 'cause the lady when her come'd to herzel had a lang talk wi' Betty, an gied her five shillin for the chiel."

"Is that another Betty?" inquired Ruby.

"Her's my daghter to be zure," said Betty Babb, senior, whose visible state of beer had not entirely obliterated a lingering recollection of her visitor. "*Yu* baint the stranger as galloped off for the dacter? But I s'pose yu be?"

Ruby signified an affirmative.

"An you'm a smart sort a lad, *yu* be. Yu be ralely," added the speaker with increased emphasis. "I'm thinkin yu would'n make a bad match for my daghter."

"I'm much obliged to you for the

compliment," replied the visitor, with a smile.

"Her's no fule, I can tell 'e," continued the mother. "Though I must say her did make a fule of hersel 'bout three years ago. But you'll zee her in a minute or zo, for her's been quite lang enough in the Waggoner's Arms to git the drap o' beer I sent her for. But plays walk in, zer, du'e."

"I thank you," replied Ruby, "but my time will not at present permit."

At this moment there came from somewhere within, a rosy-cheeked little child with a large slice of cake in each hand. Looking up with a pleasing expression of juvenile happiness and good temper, the smiling little cake-holder at once offered the contents of one hand to the visitor. In return for this natural act of generosity, the

visitor presented the child a shilling for the purchase of a toy.

"Betty, say thank 'e, zer," said the senior.

"What!" exclaimed Ruby, in surprise, "*another* Betty? Then there are three Betties? And to whom does the third belong?"

"Her belongs to my daghter," was the reply.

"Then your daughter is a widow, I presume?"

"Did'nt I tell 'e her made a fule of hersel' 'bout three yers ago? An the little Betty you now zee—her's about tu yers an tu month owld. I s'pose yu zee what I main now, don't 'e, young man?" said Betty Babb, senior.

"I quite understand you," replied Ruby, "and, with many thanks for your very can-

did and clear explanation of the matter, I wish you good-morning."

The speaker now proceeded on his way, without waiting either for the second Betty, or a "drap a' beer."



CHAPTER IV.

THE RECOGNITION.

IN the romantic town of Ilfracombe, there is—or was not long ago—an excellent hotel, excellent both with regard to interior accommodation and the extent and beauty of the external views. Certain of the coffee-room windows command a full view not only of the sea, but also of the fine promenade and walks connected with and adjoining the establishment.

Seated one morning at a late breakfast, Ruby Stone saw on the promenade the same young lady and gentleman who had

been thrown from the gig the preceding week, but whom he had lost sight of after their departure from the roadside cottage. In answer to his inquiries, he was informed by the waiter that the gentleman was the young member for Closeboro', that the young lady was his sister, and that the father, Sir Wily Wood, walking with them, had engaged private apartments at the hotel for a fortnight.

At the close of his morning repast, Ruby strolled on to the promenade, and was at once recognised by the member for Closeboro'. He had previously felt—the feeling was perhaps only a natural one under the circumstances—a certain interest in the fate of that young lady whose dishevelled tresses had partially concealed her lovely features as he assisted in carrying her to the roadside cottage in a state of insensibility. This

may account for the peculiar, yet not altogether unpleasant, sensation that came over him on his approaching the graceful object of his former attention and solicitude.

The young lady was now passing Ruby, who was still personally unknown to her, when the brother hastily withdrew from her presence and that of the father, and offered his hand to the stranger.

"My dear sir—for I have not the pleasure of knowing your name—allow me to thank you for your great kindness on the day of our misfortune. Mr. Stone?" he continued, on seeing that name on the card presented by Ruby. "How remarkable to be sure. Wood and Stone! Had not the head of my sister come into contact with a more unfeeling stone, she might have retained her sensibility at the time of the accident. Permit me to introduce you to

the lady. Mabel, we have here that previously unknown friend you have so often alluded to. It was this gentleman—Mr. Stone—who rendered you that invaluable service you were unable at the time to acknowledge."

"Papa and I were this moment referring to the event," said the fair one as the words brought a blush to her cheeks. "Allow me, sir, to thank you very sincerely for your attention on the occasion."

Mabel's thanks were conveyed to her former benefactor in a very feeling manner. Yet they were accompanied by something far more effective than the eloquence of the tongue or the gratitude of the heart. An expressive glance from her piercing eye revived in Ruby that peculiar sensation which was not altogether disagreeable, although somewhat embarrassing. He had

never in presence of any other young lady experienced a similar emotion. Could this be the first flash of love on a heart that had hitherto escaped the gentle passion ?

"The knowledge of having served you, Miss Wood, is a sufficient return for the service rendered," said Ruby. "And such an act in time of need would be a simple duty on the part of any young man in a position to perform it."

"Very true, sir!" exclaimed Mabel's father. "But it is in time of need that men so often fail in their duty. I have, therefore, much pleasure in shaking by the hand a young man whose gallantry could not have been exceeded by a Knight of the Garter."

"Summer weather!" added the son, with a smile. "Compliments for past services are all very well, *so far as they go.*"

"Exactly so, Seymour," continued Sir Wily. "I was just about to solicit the honour of Mr. Stone's company at dinner this evening."

"That's better," said Seymour to his sister.

"I shall have much pleasure in accepting your invitation," replied Ruby.

Yet he *felt*, if he did not betray, the effect of a novel situation: for when his eye again encountered an expressive glance from Sir Wily's lovely daughter, the peculiar sensation created at the introduction was now intensified by personal civilities he had not previously been accustomed to. But after a brief stroll with his new and courteous friends, he took leave of them till the appointed hour for dinner.

* * * *

Eating and drinking seldom comprise either the chief or *only* object of those who

give or accept invitations to dinner. A choice repast more frequently serves as the agreeable means to some end, whatever the desired end may happen to be.

Than Sir Wily Wood no one could perhaps furnish stronger evidence on the subject. The baronet's knowledge of life under various aspects—as will in due course appear—is rather extensive. Yet there is nothing *at present* to justify a supposition that in his invitation to Ruby Stone he had any but the purest motive—that of discharging, in the most friendly manner, a personal debt of gratitude on the part of his beloved and truly lovable daughter.

The dinner over and dessert on the table, there is for a while the usual desultory conversation on such occasions. There is also a desire—secretly felt, but not distinctly expressed—on the part of the host to know

a little more than he at present knows concerning the character, occupation, and position of his guest.

"A young man must have something in him to come out even as twelfth wrangler," said Sir Wily. "But you have not, I think, adopted *any* profession since you left college?"

"Not *as* a profession," replied the amateur; "although," he added with a smile, "the study of science for my own gratification has induced a few friends, with more sagacity than wit, to style me '*the professor.*' But the mind *must* be occupied in some way or other."

"And in what way better than on science, to which the world is indebted for so much of its greatness? Have you devoted any attention to the interesting subject of astronomy?" inquired the host.

"A little time, and, I suppose, a little too much attention," replied Ruby. "My friends tell me I am far too often in the clouds."

"They say that, no doubt, without implying that your ideas are in any way clouded," observed the member for Closeboro'. "By-the-bye, I have not heard whether by the recent transit of Venus the *Savans* are less divided in their opinions concerning our distance from the sun?"

"Seymour, my son," interrupted the parent, "the subject is a shade beyond your mark for critical observation. Terrestrial objects come more within your legitimate sphere of action. But to Mr. Stone I have no doubt the celestial Venus is a far more attractive planet than any mortal goddess?"

The amateur was just at this moment in

the act of assisting the fair daughter of the host to a glass of wine.

"Possibly so, Sir Wily," said the young gallant, who was a little embarrassed by the remark. Quickly recovering his self-possession, he added, "It is not at all times convenient to reply to a personal question on the instant."

A crimson blush on Mabel's cheeks was a silent acknowledgment of Ruby's gallantry.

"I presume, Mr. Stone, you have not attempted to probe the mystical regions of man's antiquity?" said the host.

"At present I am only on the threshold of scientific research. But without attempting to penetrate the remote period, or fathom the unfathomable subject you name, I have not failed, in viewing the works of the great creation, to observe the

absolute littleness of the greatest men, while in comparison with the least of these, I have discovered my own utter insignificance."

"Modesty is the natural ally of merit," returned Sir Wily, "and I should be sorry, in presence of both, to say anything that might prove offensive to either. Yet science, I am convinced, is destined to play an important part in the future welfare of the human race, and this cannot of course be accomplished without intellectual progress. The title given to you by private friends may some day be publicly recognised as the eminent professor, Ruby Stone."

The amateur smiled.

"Yet, in every age," continued the host, "the self-denial of men, in their devotion to some noble purpose, has often failed to

be acknowledged till after a labourer has become a silent martyr to his labours."

"Believe me, Sir Wily," replied Ruby, "I have not sufficient self-denial to sacrifice private propects in hope either of present eminence or posthumous fame. *My* taste for science is not cultivated with a view to either."

Mabel had listened with marked attention to the conversation. Her polished mind—like a magnetic needle—was sensitive to the most refined or delicate touch. Attracted by the intellectual taste of the guest, the attraction had already produced a sensation corresponding with that felt by her admirer.

"Alas!" she said to herself, "that infinite pleasure should be attended by infinite pain. I am so greatly entertained, that I almost wish I had never seen my entertainer."

"I presume, Mr. Stone," said the member for Closeboro', "you have not studied science as applied simply to amusements?"

"I have not made it my special study," was the reply.

"Yet the effects produced by the aid of science at the hands of modern wizards are often very marvellous," added the member.

"They are indeed, Seymour," said Mabel.

"Do you really think so, Miss Wood?" complaisantly inquired the amateur.

"I really think so, Mr. Stone," replied Mabel, with a blush.

"Then you may be surprised to hear that the marvel chiefly arises from a want of knowledge on the subject. If familiar with the means by which such effects are produced, you would cease to marvel.

Have you any objection to be enlightened by a very simple illustration ?"

"Not the least objection, if you would not object to afford me that pleasure."

Mabel, in her desire for knowledge on the subject, was at once supported both by her father and brother, and the cheerful manner in which the guest responded was a proof of the pleasure he derived in the performance.

"You must first know," said Ruby, "that a conjuror or wizard is usually engaged in a secret confederacy with something or somebody. My own confederates on this occasion happen to be concealed in my portmanteau. If you will pardon my absence for a few minutes' private conference, the result will soon be made manifest." On returning after a brief absence, the amateur continued, "I have

duly considered what may be deemed a suitable illustration at your hospitable board, and must now ask permission to make use of a few wine glasses. As there is not a sufficient number of empty ones on the table, perhaps, Sir Wily, you will desire the waiter to bring in another half dozen, together with a decanter of water."

The glasses and water, with two or three tumblers, were brought in, placed before the guest, and the waiter retired.

"Here we have a decanter of water," continued Ruby. "In proof of this I will fill one of the glasses before me to enable any one to be satisfied by tasting the contents."

Curiosity concerning what might follow induced each to taste the water, and all were satisfied.

"Well," continued the performer, "you would doubtless be surprised if from the same decanter of water I could, by instant conversion, supply sherry for dinner, port for dessert, milk for a baby, champagne for a lady, or even a glass of ink for those who may require it."

At the mention of each of the foregoing, the performer filled from the decanter of water a glass of liquid corresponding exactly in colour and appearance with that named.

"I do not ask you to taste the counterfeits, because the flavour might not suit the palate. But you have now seen the seemingly instant conversion of water into what has at least the appearance of something very different."

When all had expressed astonishment at the magical transformation, Ruby, on taking

from his pocket a few stoppered bottles about the size of a thimble, said,

"Astonishment will at once cease on your acquaintance with the simple process by which it was produced. Here are my confederates. They contain certain powerful essences, one or two drops of which at the bottom of a glass will produce the required colour and effect immediately the water is added. On retiring from the room I introduced the imperceptible drop or drops into the borrowed glasses, and requested the waiter to bring in the tray so soon as glasses were called for. I will now take other clean and empty glasses, and, in your presence, introduce the required drop to produce in colour and appearance any beverage you may name."

Mabel had special and secret reasons for wishing she had never seen her present

entertainer. Yet the talent displayed by the scientific amateur, together with his pleasing manner of address and graceful deportment, seemed to increase rather than lessen her desire for the continuance of the performance.

"You say you studied science for *your own* gratification," said Mabel to the performer. "I think, Mr. Stone, you might also have said, 'and for the gratification of *others*.'"

"If *you* have derived pleasure from the present simple exposition, I am indeed amply rewarded," replied Ruby. "My departed parent who had no taste for anything of the kind, considered scientific study to be a waste both of time and money. On the other hand, *I* had no taste for the anything but experimental duties of a merchant's counting-house."

"Pray, Mr. Stone, was there any relationship between you and the late eminent merchant of the same name?" inquired the host.

"Merely the relationship that is supposed to exist between father and son," was the reply.

"Is that all?" said Sir Wily with a smile, accompanied with a significant glance at the member for Closeboro'. "You say your father considered science a costly study? But my son here, if I mistake not, would have found it a less expensive game than that of politics."

"Different people have different tastes," replied the son. "A striking proof of this has just been furnished by our scientific and talented guest, who has shown that such difference may exist even in the same family."

"*Your* talent, Seymour, is not of a scientific character," said the sister.

"*My* talent," replied the brother with a laugh. "If you have discovered a family treasure that has been previously hid under a bushel, pray tell me how to convert it—after the manner of a wizard — so as to produce a striking effect."

Before parting for the night, Ruby Stone received a polite invitation—*readily accepted* —to visit Sir Wily Wood on the return of the family to London. If he had made a favourable impression on others, he had himself been favourably impressed by *one* at least of the party.



CHAPTER V.

*ERNEST, THE WANDERER, IN HAMPSHIRE.**

* Each place named in his travels was personally visited by the wanderer, and the transcribed notes were taken from actual observation.

WELL, there is a certain advantage in having only a single friend with whom to converse, especially when that friend happens to be *oneself*. There is no fear of a quarrel. I have made a capital breakfast, though the eggs were hard as my own surname, and the buttered toast decidedly *dry*. But having completed my survey of this district, I must furnish the Chief Justice with my first budget, pay the bill, and

"Like time-bound bagman* at his closing page,
Pack up my traps for the ensuing stage."

(*Letter* I.)

"Southampton, June 7th.'

"DEAR UNCLE,

"If the word *beauty* may be applied to places as well as to natural objects, and if the writer be not too young to form an opinion on the subject, this may be called a beautiful town. Beautifully bounded by water, it is ornamented by parks and flower gardens, while at the chief entrance the stately avenue of trees in their summer attire may be truly termed beautiful.

"In the park opposite the window at which I am now seated, there is a fine statue of the late Lord Palmerston, while in

* Commercial traveller.

another part may be seen one of Dr. Isaac Watts, who was a native of the town.

"The Hartley Institution with its extensive library, is the most notable building for mental culture in the town. The founder left £103,887 to build and endow his noble project. But litigation occasioned by claimants, each of whom wanted a finger in the monetary pie, reduced the sum to £42,525. Yet this has been the means of raising a lasting monument to the founder's memory. The building was opened by Lord Palmerston in 1862.

"As churches and chapels are to be found in every part of Her Majesty's dominions, their enumeration—as I have only to note *remarkable* objects — will not, I presume, be required at my hands?

"Netley Abbey, about three miles from

here, was founded by Henry III. in 1239. The ruins are well worth a visit.

"The Royal Victoria Hospital—a fine sight from the water—is about half-a-mile from the Abbey. It was built at a cost of £400,000 for the reception of invalid soldiers, and is capable of accommodating 1,200 patients. It was opened in 1863.

"In the ancient town of Winchester, the Cathedral is, of course, the prominent feature. In its external appearance there is nothing very attractive. The attractions are within. Among these the gothic sculpture of the stone altar-screen and the monumental chantries which surround the choir are very fine. At least, they are so pronounced by better judges than the present writer.

"In bringing to a close the first descriptive sheet in that provincial course of study

through which the pupil is expected to gain a 'knowledge of the world,' a seemingly insurmountable difficulty in the task compels me to refer to what you were pleased to call the *vital points* in your tutorial command. You said:—

"'Let candour in your communications be the ruling feature, under the assurance that honest opinions, although unpalatable, will not prove offensive. Your epistles will not be too long if they are not *too dry*.'

"Such were my instructions. In the fulfilment of the first part there will be *no* difficulty. 'Candour' will be the chief ingredient in each composition. But in your closing assurance that my epistles will 'not be too long if they are not too dry,' the course of the writer is not equally clear. With long epistles my head may supply

you, but in the absence of a natural spring of filial love, how can the heart prevent those epistles from being 'dry?' Unable to moisten my sheets with the tear-drops of affection, must I trust to the morning or evening dew—when it falls—to supply the deficiency? If not, where shall I seek a vital source to remedy the present defect? *Time* may supply the want. As there is so much that is artificial and so little that is natural in the way of the world, daily study may, after a while, enable me to furnish a counterfeit for a reality.

"Meanwhile, as 'candour' will prevent the use of that much-abused word *affectionate*, you will please to accept an appropriate substitute, when I subscribe myself, in Ernest, your *dutiful* nephew, a

"ROLLING STONE.

"Colonel Stone, C.B."

So much for that; I must now supplement the performance by a few lines to a nearer and dearer relative, and then bid farewell to the town.

"Southampton, June 7th.

"My dear Sister,

"At the expiration of another hour I shall be on my way to the Isle of Wight. From thence I will forward an address for your next communication. Let me know where and in what manner you have located Rosa and her mother.

"I have just completed and closed my first despatch for the Sentinel.* Should the dish be too *dry* for his digestion, I must flavour the next with some other kind of sauce. Time may modify my feelings,

* Name by which Ernest and Maria referred to their uncle.

but at present I dislike the man. Yet Christian charity will never permit that dislike to resolve itself into the godless compound of *hatred.*

"Accept the essence of an opposite attribute in the love of your brother

"ERNEST.

"To sister Maria.

"P.S.—I omitted to mention a curious little incident that happened during my visit to Netley Abbey. You remember Mr. and Mrs. Belman who some years since so often visited us, and who were so *very* fond of children, although they had none of their own? You may also remember what the neighbours said about that beautiful girl named 'Pearl,' of whom Mr. and Mrs. Belman one day became so mysteriously possessed? It was said that

'In a silver cloud with a golden border the mysterious little stranger was suddenly dropped from above.'

"Could not this mystery be solved by our scientific brother who has been so often in the clouds? But let me describe the incident to which I alluded. Here it is. While exploring the ruins of Netley Abbey I met Mr. and Mrs. Belman and their charming Pearl, similarly engaged. They had just returned from France after having resided there two years to perfect the young lady's education. She says she remembers me quite well, and could show me a valentine she received from Ernest Stone when Ernest was at school. I have only to add that at the apartments of Mr. and Mrs. Belman and their precious Pearl I spent a very, *very* pleasant evening. Is it not strange?—and still more strange, that such

an event should have happened before I have been engaged a week in my endeavour to obtain a 'knowledge of the world?' Our late and long absent friends have now left for Ventnor, and on my journey through the island they may possibly receive a second visit from

"E. S."



CHAPTER VI.

THE BARONET AND FAMILY.

BARONETS may be highly considered and have rich relations without being all rich men. Sir Wily Wood, widower, is brother-in-law of an earl. That earl owns the greater part of Closeboro', now represented by his nominee and nephew, Seymour Wood, and formerly represented by Sir Wily.

The present baronet is comparatively a *poor man,* at least poor for one bearing a dignified or lofty title. His small, or contracted, income is the result of extravagant

habits, among which may be named horse-racing, and kindred "fancies." His limited means can only be explained by the fact that for several years he has lived *beyond his means*, and that a large portion of his income goes to pay interest on old debts.

Seymour Wood, M.P. for Closeboro', happens to be a young man in every way worthy of his sire. His sporting propensities are not calculated to improve the encumbered family estate, unless he should realize his hope of making a "fortunate spec.," as he calls it, under the head of matrimony. The want of success—should he prove unsuccessful — will not arise through want of *venture*,

> "Nor time nor season, circumstance nor place,
> Can keep his eye from an engaging face."

But passionate speculators in female

beauty framed in gold, like rash speculators in anything else, are almost sure to be taken in at some time or other. It will be seen by what follows that the sporting heir to an exalted but moneyless title, was not an exception to the rule.

The annual exhibition of pictures at the Royal Academy happened to be open. Among the numerous visitors assembled on a particular day may be named the member for Closeboro'. He was here with a double object—that of seeing animate as well as inanimate life, of beholding natural as well as artificial beauties, or of looking at *real* objects by side of highly finished imitations.

Seymour had not been long at the Royal Academy before his vision lighted on a female form that, for elegance, grace, and beauty, far surpassed anything that adorned

the walls of the pictorial exhibition. She was a lady that appeared exactly moulded to the mind of her unknown admirer. And she was *alone.* There are public places of instruction and resort to which a lady may with propriety *go* alone. The Royal Academy is one of these places. What of that? An opportunity that would enable our hero to address the lady in question appeared one of the most unlikely things in the world. But fortune favours the brave. On the lovely object of attraction taking her departure from the exhibition, the member for Closeboro' happened to be moving out at the same time. A few drops of rain fell at the moment the lady was on the point of leaving the building. Here was the wished-for opportunity. It was at once embraced. Seymour had an umbrella. The lady had none. She was going to a

shop only a few doors from the Academy. With many thanks, although in broken English, she accepted the proffered covering. The gallant at the same moment hailed a cab for himself. "I am merely about to attend to my parliamentary duties in the House of Commons, and will send or call for the umbrella in a day or two in any part of London you may name." Accepting this additional offer with additional thanks, and with all the fascination peculiar to an accomplished *foreign artiste*, the lady presented the member for Closeboro' with her card, and the member for Closeboro' started in his cab for the House of Commons. The ride allowed him a few minutes leisure to ruminate on the event that had just taken place.

"Madame Amélie Olivier! A widow, no doubt. Yet barely one and twenty.

But if young for a wife, how *very* young for a widow. And what is still more remarkable—how lovely! She is the most bewitching creature I ever beheld. To *me* there is an irresistible charm in a French tongue that seasons its native language with a little broken English. The task of correcting such a pupil is a delightful service for a tutor. Let me see: what's the address of the enchantress? Number —, Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square. To-morrow before one I shall call for my umbrella. Madame Amélie Olivier is a lady I could marry after a week's courtship —that is, if she be rich in purse as well as in person." The present reduced income of Sir Wily would not permit his son to marry *entirely* for love—no: not even with a French Venus.

At the close of this soliloquy the member

for Closeboro' alighted from his cab and proceeded to his place in the House of Commons. On the following day he called on Madame Amélie Olivier. After sending up his card, he was conducted to a well-furnished drawing-room in which he discovered the lady reading, and—in a morning costume of exquisite taste—looking more fascinating than ever.

"Good morning, madam. I trust you did not get your feet wet last evening?"

"Oui—yes, sare, I get wets a *leetle*."

"But you did not take cold, I hope?"

"Non, non. I go early to my sleeps, monsieur, and I feel shame to receive you in dis négligé of de morning. I 'ave not 'ave time for decorate meself."

"In *your* case, madam," replied the gallant senator, "that time might be dispensed with: for in England we truly say that

beauty unadorned is adorned the most! You do not understand ?"

"I am quite *confuse*," said the lady as she brought forward a chair for her visitor. "Vill you be so good as sits down, monsieur ?"

"Really, madam," replied Seymour, on seating himself, "I ought to apologise for this intrusion, but I came thus early, thinking you might otherwise have been from home."

"You 'ave not come vidout your brakefast ?" inquired the fair one.

"Oh dear, no. Yet the loss of that or any other meal would be a trifle compared with the pleasure of conversing with one who has a taste for the fine arts. And I have no doubt, madam, that you are equally fond of music ?"

"Oui, monsieur,—yes, indeed, *me* very

fond of vat you tink. And *you* 'ave love for de musique ?"

"Passionately fond of it," was the reply. "It moves the soul to love. But you do not comprehend ?"

Madame Olivier smiled a reply.

"And *to me*, madam, music is doubly melodious when the singer or player can otherwise charm—but pardon me for asking whether the present is your first visit to London ?"

"Non, non—no, sare, I 'ave been in dis cité ven——"

"When your husband was living, I suppose ?"

"Mon mari ? Oui—yes, sare, my husband, Jules, he go to de new Haven."

"I fully comprehend your meaning, madam. He left his happy home on earth to go to one in heaven above ? And when

the time shall come for a new Heaven, you will, no doubt, meet him there."

Madame shook her head, and the visitor was at a loss to know the reason. After a pause, she said—

"He go to meet vid his fader."

"Now I understand you, madam,—he is gone to meet his Heavenly Father."

"He fly avay vidout his Amélie," continued the lady in seeming grief.

"But, surely, dear madam, you can have no desire to leave your present home?" inquired the visitor in a sympathetic tone.

"Oui—yes, monsieur. My moder mark our two soul for de love and de unité, and not for 'ave dem separate."

"Madame Olivier," said the visitor, on drawing his chair near to the object of his attention, "although it has pleased the Father of all to separate those souls, you

do not for a moment suppose that the remaining one will be left without a protector? one that will prove in every way as kind, if not so dear, to Amélie as Jules?"

"His fader 'ave behave very bad to Amélie," said the lady.

"But believe me, dear madam,—may I call you Amélie?" feelingly inquired Seymour as he took her by the hand.

Withdrawing her hand in a manner too gentle to denote that she had taken offence at the advance, she said—"You 'ave takes me by de hand vidout to know me, monsieur."

"Yes," continued her admirer with increased warmth; "but I desire not only to know you, but also that you should know the character and position of him who now —inspired by the most honourable inten-

tions—would gladly become your future friend and protector."

Assuming an air of extreme modesty, Madame Olivier softly replied—

"Dis visite 'ave already produce many strange tings on my head. Mon Dieu! my brain is nevair in de propare place ven I am confuse. Non, non, it is always out of de vay ven anyting extraordinaire happen."

"Your modesty, madam, becomes a lady of refined or delicate views," said Seymour, as he rose from his seat. "Let me simply ask what I trust you will grant—permission for your visitor to call again?"

"Non, non."

This was delivered with a smile that denoted anything but a negative meaning. Rising from her seat the respondent added,

"Oui, monsieur,—ven Jules ave come back from de new Haven."

"When your husband comes from Heaven?" said Seymour. "Pray do not dwell on anything so remote. I mean *to-day*, or at least *to-morrow*. In the meantime consider me your friend, and permit me to call you *mine?* Say *yes*," he added, on taking her hand, which was not again withdrawn.

"Mon ami?" said the lady.

"Yes," replied Seymour.

"Je ne dis pas non—I do not say no," was the rejoinder, as the speaker, either by accident or *design*, knocked over from the table, near which she stood, a work-box, which, falling on the floor, made noise enough to be heard in any part of the house. "Ven he 'ave come, you vill be

more acquaint vid de historie of my husband."

"*That* would be interesting, no doubt," said the visitor. "But it is *your* history, dear madam, that more immediately concerns me. In proof of this, I must insist on sealing the declaration with a kiss."

"Amélie! Amélie!" in a sonorous voice; and at the very moment of the embrace was a sound that proceeded from a dark-visaged individual, who rushed into the room, to the real and indescribable amazement of the visitor, and to the *seeming* surprise of the lady.

"Grande merci! Voici mon mari!—dis *is* my husband!"

"Your *husband?*" said Seymour, in a feverish tone of excitement. "Why you —you told me your husband was in Heaven!"

"She tell de truth," said the stranger, with an indignant air. "I 'ave come from de Newhaven dis minute."

"From *Newhaven!*" echoed the astonished visitor, as a new light on the subject began to dawn on his mind.

"I leave my poor old fader and fly avay to my — quel horreur! — Amélie! Amélie!"

On seating herself, and covering her face with her hands, Amélie, in seeming sorrow, replied—

"Dis gentlehome 'ave make *mistake.*"

Catching at the sound of the word, Seymour immediately added—

"It is altogether a mistake, sir, I assure you."

"Oui," continued the lady; "but Jules vill pardon—vill forgive——"

"Nevair! nevair!" interrupted Jules. "I know dis man."

"*Know* me?" said Seymour.

"I 'ave mark you sits in de common house of de people."

"In the House of Commons?" inquired the excited member,

"Vare dis ting must be expose," was the reply.

"My dear sir, I wouldn't for twenty pounds——"

"For vat did you say?" hastily demanded the Frenchman.

"If I can only satisfy you concerning this unfortunate mistake—but pray accompany me to my club?"

The seemingly enraged husband of Amélie accepted the invitation; and in a private room at the club of the member for Closeboro', a "serious mistake" was

compromised for the sum of twenty pounds.

After a friendly chat over a bottle of champagne, and the subsequent departure of his guest, the enlightened member for Closeboro' began to suspect not only that he had been *taken in* to the extent of twenty pounds, but that a "second mistake" through imperfect English from the lips of Amélie might be condoned for another twenty.

The sporting habits of a needy baronet, and the amorous fancies of his son and heir, have now been faintly foreshadowed. There is yet another member of the family to which brief allusion must be made.

Mabel, the daughter of Sir Wily, and sister to the member for Closeboro', is thus closely related to both. Apart from this relationship, there is little or no affinity

between them. But at this stage of the social drama, it is only necessary to observe that a more lovely or lovable girl than Mabel Wood it would be difficult to find.



CHAPTER VII.

ERNEST, THE WANDERER, IN THE ISLE OF WIGHT.

WELL, I have settled my business in the island, and something in the island appears to have *un*-settled me. How remarkable! Before leaving London, I *believed* myself to be in love. Daily, for nearly two years, I beheld a girl whom I imagined to be formed after my own heart. It only wanted a few scholastic touches to convert the ideal image into a finished and beautiful reality.

Was this nothing more than a dream?

And have two little weeks since I left London been sufficient to dispel the charming illusion? These are questions easily asked, but not so easily answered. Let me try another kind of problem.

The strength of ardent spirits is determined by the number of degrees. Is it thus with love? If in the insinuating element of youth there are certain degrees below or above proof, I have surely tasted at a degree against which my feelings have been anything but proof.

Never, except during two evenings spent with Mr. and Mrs. Belman and their precious Pearl, have I experienced such an exquisite sensation as that created by a fair one's winning ways. I had all along been dreaming that I might some day behold in Rosa Bland those varied accomplishments without which beauty

itself is not altogether beautiful. But in the mysterious Pearl the perfection of nature and art would appear realised. In *her* presence there is an irresistible charm, by the like of which I have never before been fascinated. This is a mystery even greater than that of the charmer. But as her guardian will dine with me at Portsmouth on the day of the review, I must endeavour to fathom the *little* mystery before I attempt to account for the greater one.

One! two! three! So says the clock; and as the boat for Portsmouth will leave at four, the execution of my despatch for the Sentinel must correspond with the speed employed in running over and sailing round the island, to which it will refer.

(*Letter* 2.)

"Ryde, I. W.,
"June 14th.

"DEAR UNCLE,

"You may remember that one of the reasons, if not the chief reason, you assigned for my expulsion from London originated in *fear*—the fear of my taking a 'hasty step.'

"'Candour' compels me to inform you that I have this week taken a very 'hasty step.' I have hurried over in seven days a performance which ought to have occupied at least a month. This haste accords with the charge by which it is prompted. You wish me to embrace every opportunity for obtaining a knowledge of the world, especially that part of the world called the United Kingdom. As an event of national importance is announced to take

place at Portsmouth in a few days, I deem it well to seek for 'quarters,' while there is a chance of securing them.

"Concerning my first visit to the delightful island I am about to leave, a lively sense of pleasure suggests a valid question. Yet the succeeding thought would seem to say, 'By whom shall that question be answered?' If departed spirits could furnish a reply, I might write thus:—'When sister Maria, brother Ruby, and I were taken for an annual trip to that refuge for vulgarity,* the only natural beauties of which comprised illiterate Cockneys and Cockneyisms, why was the giddy scene never varied? Why, during the entire course of years, from childhood upward, were we never once allowed to behold the more attractive features of the

* Margate.

Isle of Wight? Was it that the view of £ *s. d.* so dazzled the vision of your departed brother, that the time between the last boat on Saturday and the early return boat on Monday was all he could spare for a visit to his wife and family? Alas! alas! for the contracted views of money-hoarders! A momentary reflex of so sad a picture has almost drawn tears from a stone. As they have not *quite* reached the surface, I fear there may again be an absence of natural humidity in my despatch. But the Isle of Wight is the subject of the despatch, not the want of a cultivated taste on the part of adults, by whom youthful branches were kept in ignorance of the beauties of their own country.

"Having driven through and sailed round this marine garden in mid-ocean, I

will simply say that it forms an insular picture of inland fertility and external grandeur superior to anything I have previously seen. Of course, I have not at present seen much; and before the expiration of my 'term' I may possibly behold other and still more charming retreats.

"That the Queen of England should have a residence in the island, is a matter that can surprise no one familiar with its attractive features. Were I one of the lords of the creation, instead of a humble labourer toiling for a *distant object*, I could scarcely desire a more princely, yet retired region than the vicinity of Osborne. In its natural seclusion and genial atmosphere, may be found all that is calculated to impart a bloom to the intelligence of youth, and vigour to the years of manhood.

"But I am now, not without regret, about to bid adieu to this beautiful island. On my journey hence, a touch of the poet's feelings, through which the following well-known lines were inspired, may induce me to vocalise the author's words, by singing—

"'Absence makes the heart grow fonder:
Isle of Beauty, fare thee well.'

To which I may be permitted to add—

"This heart, perchance, may yet return,
And on that Isle of Beauty dwell.

"Meanwhile, under the necessity of departure, I may, in reference to the attractive and varied features I am at present compelled to leave, be allowed to subscribe myself your charmed but unsettled nephew, a

"HAPLESS WIGHT.

"Colonel Stone, C.B."

And now let me see what sister Maria has to say in her last.

"Belgrave Square,
"June 13th.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,

"Mrs. Bland has a nice little cottage in Chelsea, and Rosa is placed in a good establishment at Brompton, so that I am not far from either. Rosa will write to you after she has been a month or two at school.

"I was surprised to hear of your having met Mr. and Mrs. Belman, after we had lost sight of them so long. I have a perfect recollection of the beautiful yet mysterious Pearl. But is there not something equally mysterious about her guardians? I remember papa saying they failed in business; yet after little Pearl came to reside with them, they appeared to have

money enough to do *without* business. If the young lady has been two years in France to complete her education, her education, I presume, is *complete.* This has not, I hope, induced you to make comparisons?

"It is now *your* turn to receive a surprise, and the news I have to communicate will surely occasion it.

"Our scientific brother, Ruby, has descended from the clouds, and condescended to make himself gracious with mortals here below. During his search for fossils in the West of England, he accidentally became acquainted with Sir Wily Wood and family—people of fashionable life, and highly connected. Sir Wily has presented our brother with a valuable gun. What's the object of such a presentation I am at a loss to divine; for Ruby, you are aware,

has no taste for anything in the form of shooting, except it be that of 'shooting stars.' One might have supposed the weapon intended for the Sentinel, who has expressed a high opinion of it, and as the nephew—with whom he is now on *speaking* terms—has offered him the use of the gun, it will no doubt (at the annual sacrifice of grouse) be duly tested on the 12th of August.

"Miss Wood, the only daughter of Sir Wily, is really a charming girl. In appearance and manner, she greatly resembles dear Rosa; but, of course, she is more accomplished than either Rosa or

"Your affectionate sister,

"MARIA.

"To brother Ernest."



CHAPTER VIII.

THE WIDOW'S COTTAGE.

THE rendezvous. A convenient place of meeting is the widow's cottage; and a cheerful, warm-hearted, and truly unselfish person is the Widow Bland. The aspect of the cottage, too, is quite in keeping with the pleasing appearance of the tenant. Everything in perfect taste and good order. Tiny beds of choice flowers in the little garden without, and the chaste character of a small number of ornaments that adorn the neatly furnished rooms within, are each and all

silent yet visible symbols of the owner's refined views and graceful bearing.

The privileged few who visit at the widow's cottage are soon made to feel themselves at home. Lieutenant the Honourable (or *dishonourable*) Harry Hunter, during his few visits, professed himself to be *quite at home.* But immediately a well-grounded suspicion arose that the money of Maria Stone was the *chief object* of his visits, the cottage-door was for ever closed against him and his disguised designs.

Mabel, the motherless and only daughter of Sir Wily Wood, is already included in Maria Stone's small circle of friends. Mabel is in blissful ignorance of the vast riches of the family with whom she has formed an acquaintance. Sir Wily, having in a former case discovered that his

daughter's regard for a suitor could in no way be influenced by *money*, deemed it prudent to be silent relative to the wealth of the young man of whom she had expressed a very high opinion.

Poor Mabel! Whatever might be her natural feelings on the subject, a scrupulous sense of right and wrong prevented anything beyond the expression of a *high opinion* of Ruby Stone. A secret desire was counteracted by an obstacle, not of her own, but of her father's creation. The germs of true love had possibly taken root in her heart; yet, for reasons that will in due course be made manifest, she earnestly prayed that those germs might never sprout.

The scientific amateur had at length discovered a human object worthy of *study*. Like nature in unadorned and majestic

grandeur, the character of Mabel in its pure and potent simplicity appeared exalted and noble. In her artless and winning manner she had already created on the mind of Ruby an impression more powerful and lasting, because more natural than any produced by the most gifted actress. In her own native grace lay the secret of an unconscious power. She charmed the mind by her innocence and made the heart a captive without an effort.

Maria Stone and her new acquaintance have just entered the widow's cottage, after having paid a visit to Admiral Sir John and Lady Blue who were intimate friends of Maria's late parents.

"The tea-things laid of course," said Maria to Mrs. Bland.

"Of course," repeated the widow.

"Although I told you it was very doubtful whether we should call again on our way home."

"Yet, dear, I thought that in case you might do so, a cup of tea would be refreshing after your long walk."

"And in your thought of others your natural instinct seldom fails. I shall quite enjoy a cup of tea, shan't you, Mabel?" inquired Maria.

"Very much, dear," was the reply.

Bonnets were quickly displaced and the visitors as quickly seated at the widow's table.

"We have just paid a visit to Lady Blue," said Maria. "The Admiral leaves for Portsmouth this evening, as there is to be a grand naval review at Spithead during the week. He has promised to call on Ernest at his hotel."

"And won't poor Ernest be delighted to see him?" said the widow, who with difficulty suppressed a rising tear as she poured out the tea for her visitors.

"Mrs. Bland resided with you when your parents were alive, did she not, Maria?" inquired Mabel.

Maria signified an affirmative.

"I thought so, dear. Otherwise a mother would not, I suppose, be likely to take so warm an interest in other people's children? But the matter is now fully explained."

"Not *fully*," said the widow with emotion. "If you only knew the interest those dear children take in me and my only one — but that you can never know."

"I hope, Mrs. Bland, you will not deem

me inquisitive?" Mabel felt that she had unintentionally touched on a delicate subject. "Believe me, I do not for a moment wish to pry—"

"Of course not, dear," interrupted Maria. "The matter involves what is termed 'a family secret.' And in every family there is sure to be a little secret of some kind or other."

"Secrets merely interesting to those pledged to regard them as such," added the widow. "You are no doubt aware of that, Miss Wood?"

"I can readily *imagine* it. But pray call me Mabel," continued the young lady with a sigh. "My few visits to this comfortable little home have produced a feeling so different to that experienced at formal and fashionable receptions that I wish, dear Mrs. Bland, you would in future

call me, as you do Maria, by my Christian name."

"You *will*, won't you?" said Maria, as she threw her arm around the widow's neck and kissed her. "And I'm *sure* you will when I tell you that dear Mabel has been still more unfortunate than those whom you now regard as your children, for Mabel became motherless even before she knew her mother."

"And as we're all orphans together," cheerfully replied Mrs. Bland, "we'll add the name of Mabel to our family circle. But now that our new member is acquainted both with Ruby and my own Rosa, I'm sorry she did not see dear Ernest before he left home."

"I should have been so glad to have made his acquaintance, especially as he is regarded as a model brother.

When do you expect him in town, Maria?"

"In about two years, dear."

"Two years!" exclaimed Mabel, whose surprise arose from ignorance of the cause. "What's the *object* of his long absence, Maria?"

"To obtain a knowledge of the world. At least, so says the Sentinel."

"The *Sentinel*, did you say, Maria?"

"A title we've given to our watchful guardian," continued the ward. "It's to *him*, Mabel, we're indebted for the sad loss of our brother's society."

"But he has not, I hope, been expelled from your society for any serious offence?"

"A *very* serious one," replied Maria, with a smile—"*love* without the permission of a third person."

"If that be a serious offence," said the astonished Mabel, "I presume it would be an unpardonable *crime* to love even without the permission of a *second* person?"

"I really can't say, dear. But without violating our pledge or disclosing a forbidden name, I may tell you that the chief aim of our rigorous guardian is to separate Ernest from a poor but darling girl to whom he is attached."

"How *very* cruel," said Mabel.

"Pardon me, my dear girls," feelingly observed the widow; "but I really think you might find some more agreeable topic of conversation."

"I think so too," said Maria. "And this reminds me, Mabel, we omitted to tell Mrs. Bland that Lady Blue has offered us the use of her box at the Opera for Thurs-

day. Yet in the absence of Ernest, I am not aware of any male friend who would be happy at a moment's notice to serve as an escort to two young ladies *unattached.*"

An involuntary sigh was instantly caused by that simple word, as poor Mabel said to herself, "I wish to heaven the term could be truly applied to *me.*"

"Ruby is not so fond of music as dear Ernest," said Mrs. Bland. "I remember him once saying that he much preferred a simple English ballad to an Italian squall in hysterics."

A loud double knock at the door is heard.

"How remarkable! there's your brother's knock," continued the widow as she hastened to the door and quickly returned with the young gentleman named.

"We have only this moment finished tea," said Maria on her brother's entrance.

"And *after* the finish," replied Ruby as he seated himself at the table, "it would be a satire on female taste to ask whether there is a good cup left in the pot?"

The contents of the pot had been strengthened by the hostess ere the speaker had closed his observation.

"We were just telling Mrs. Bland that Lady Blue has offered us the use of her box at the Opera for Thursday."

"Her Ladyship was always very kind in that way," replied Ruby.

"Yet," continued Maria, "in the absence of Ernest as an escort—"

"Ruby would be a poor substitute, eh, Maria?" interrupted the brother. "Never-

theless, I shall be most happy to serve as an escort, should my services prove acceptable."

"If I may reply in the plural number," (Maria here looked to Mabel, who blushed an assent,) "we shall be glad of your company on the occasion."

"But we shall not, I hope, interfere with your scientific studies, Mr. Stone?" said Mabel.

"On the contrary, Miss Wood," replied Ruby, "*your* society may possibly tend to advance them."

Yet Mabel was at present a subject beyond the power of amateur science to comprehend. Always courteous and seemingly pleased to see Ruby, she studiously avoided anything that might appear to encourage more than a friendly advance. Ruby, on the other hand, felt more and

more anxious to establish a closer relationship. "You must know, Miss Wood, that ever since that memorable accident in the West of England, of which you may still have some faint recollection—"

"You mean when Mabel was thrown from the chaise, do you not, Ruby?" interrupted the sister.

"I mean at that moment when in search of fossils I happened to pick up an interesting subject of *another* kind. Since that anxious period I have put aside certain abstruse problems, in order to devote a little attention to natural philosophy. Thinking it a theme that might conduce to human happiness, I desired, if possible, to profit by the study. But I'm sorry to say the success of the student has not been quite equal to his desire."

"Do you understand this, Mabel?" innocently inquired Maria. "Scientific subjects seem to me something like scraps of religion that appear in the form of parables."

"Possibly so, Maria," said the amateur. "Yet that which would seem a little obscure to one person may appear perfectly clear to the mind of another."

Mabel remained silent. An occasional blush was the only external sign of an *inward* struggle. Yet the conflict between a sense of honour and a little spark of love she could not extinguish was at this moment a severe one. The secret knowledge of something that tended to restrain the natural tendency of the heart, served to intensify each responsive pang produced by the pointed and playful observations of her new admirer—an admirer who indulged

his remarks in entire ignorance of any serious obstacle to his suit.

"For *your* satisfaction, Maria," continued the brother, "I'll endeavour to explain a parable or illustrate a point in natural philosophy by a simple process which you'll easily comprehend."

Hereupon the speaker took from the breast-pocket of his coat a miniature portrait.

"Do you recognise this little picture?"

"It's *your* likeness, Mabel. He asked me to lend it to him."

"Are you sure it's the *same?*" he said, on handing the picture to his sister.

"No," replied Maria, after an examination. "It's a copy. I perceive *that* by the back of the card. Photography, Mabel, is one of Ruby's hobbies, as his uncle calls them."

"So that by indulging one of my hobbies I've contrived to possess myself of something I prize—in the absence of something I should prize still more. Do you understand the nature of the subject now, Maria?"

"Indeed I *do not*, Ruby," was the reply.

"*Not?*" repeated the brother, with a laugh. "Then the original of this little picture leaves me, after all my study, in the same position as yourself." On his returning the picture to the breast-pocket of his coat, he said, "I trust, Miss Wood, you are not offended at the liberty I've taken with your negative?"

A gentle shake of the head and a forced smile served as a sad and silent response. But painful indeed was the disguise of a heart that compelled Mabel to say to her-

self, "He has won the love of the original in spite of its owner."

"Speaking of portraits," said Ruby, "I presume, Miss Wood, that your brother has a taste for the fine arts?"

"I am not aware of it, Mr. Stone," replied Mabel.

"The question was prompted by the fact of my having at the Royal Academy seen him so deeply fixed on an attractive picture, that I did not like to divert his attention from the subject. But turning from pictorial charms to those of music, pray, Maria, what is the operatic announcement for Thursday?"

"I Puritani," was the reply.

"A favourite opera with brother Ernest, and on this occasion it will be a favourite with me," said Ruby, as he rose from his seat to depart. "Meanwhile, Miss Wood,"

he continued, on taking the young lady by the hand, "I may be permitted to draw on my very limited knowledge, as a linguist, by saying *au revoir!*"

So saying, the scientific amateur and unaccepted lover left the ladies to discuss, at pleasure, any subject that might happen to pass under their review.



CHAPTER IX.

ERNEST, THE WANDERER, AT PORTSMOUTH.

"MINE has been a strange career, and *yours* promises to be equally romantic. But the world itself is a marvel. It contains an inexhaustible store of surprises, and if those of the last fifty years are to be followed by others equally great during the next half century, you'll witness a goodly number before you reach the age of three score and ten. In some things the changes have been truly astounding. In the naval review to-day, the monster ironclads that

occupy the place of the 'wooden walls of old England,' as they were called, might induce a spectator to say, 'How much farther can these things go?' Yet any wonder of the current year may be followed by something far more wonderful a few years hence. A telegram I have just received of an event that happened in a remote part of the world yesterday is simply a little dot in modern history that might have astonished my grandfather, though it has now ceased to astonish his grandchild. It's just the same with individual incidents in life. Fiction can't keep pace with reality. It's an old stage-coach compared with an express train, and after what you have told me concerning yourself —though you have not, you say, told me *all*—one need no longer be surprised at *anything*."

Such was a portion of an after-dinner speech delivered by Mr. Belman in a private room at the hotel of Ernest Stone, the wanderer, on the day of the naval review at Portsmouth. Mr. Belman had what was termed "a weakness" for choice old port, and on this occasion he happened to find a glass of the beverage exactly suited to his palate. Visible evidence of the natural (?) beeswing stamped the age and quality of the wine.

"There's one thing, Ernest, I'm at a loss to understand," continued the guest, "what's the object of your uncle, or the Sentinel, as you call him, in his desire for your long absence from London?"

"He wishes me to obtain a knowledge of the world, but this may not be his *only* object," replied Ernest.

"*My* knowledge of the world would

induce me to suspect *other* objects," said Mr. Belman, as a smack of the lips again testified to the excellence of the wine of which he had just emptied a glass. "And you can neither marry nor obtain your splendid fortune without the assent of this same uncle? It's thus decreed, is it not, Ernest?"

"The decree is unfortunately by the will of one with whom you were well acquainted, Mr. Belman."

"Is your brother in a similar fix?" inquired the guest.

"Precisely," was the reply.

"Then he may possibly not obtain his fortune till the celebration of his thirtieth birthday? Nothing surprising in this," continued the guest. "Thirty is just the age proclaimed by your father for a man to seek a crown of wisdom in exchange for a

cap of folly. So that, right or wrong, it's not an unnatural thing after all that a parent should wish his children to acquire worldly greatness, according to his own peculiar dogmas. But let me tell you, Ernest, that this strange incident in *your* life is merely one among a multitude of others. The world is full of family curiosities. Were they dragged from their respective hiding-places, there'd be some startling novelties in the display. We should have a more remarkable exhibition than was ever opened by an American Barnum. I could myself contribute rather an interesting object to the collection."

Ernest now thought that old port on a fluent tongue might possibly aid in the disclosure of the *mystery*.

"I presume, Mr. Belman, you allude to your accomplished ward?"

"Are *you* interested in that subject, Ernest?" smilingly inquired the guest, as he replenished his glass.

"Am *I* interested, you ask. It might seem like paying oneself a compliment to say that any young man of taste could hardly fail to be interested in such a subject. In proof of my interest, Mr. Belman, I may now venture to ask, what's the object of the *secret* you've so long maintained?"

"That secret, Ernest, is still *sacred.* Your curiosity is thereby excited—eh, my young friend?"

"Ladies, Mr. Belman, are usually curious on any matter you may desire to withhold from them; and perhaps this secret of yours has imparted an effeminate tinge to my nature. If so, I may be pardoned for asking more concerning Pearl than I have

a right to know? If her history is at present a sealed book——"

"Yes, Ernest," interrupted the guest. "But the time *must* come—it may be in a month or two, or it may not be for a year or two—when there will be no secret in the affair. I may now tell you that if you've derived any pleasure in the society of our ward, there has been a corresponding pleasure on the other side. But a sacred obligation also compels me to inform you that, whatever may be the complexion of her regard, she cannot—till the mysterious social veil has been withdrawn—engage herself to *any one.* And it is our duty to see that no one shall attempt to destroy the freedom she is bound to observe while under our charge. You have known each other in the playful days of childhood, and you have now renewed

the acquaintance on the eve of manhood and womanhood. So far, Ernest, there can be no objection. You well know that Mrs. Belman and I regard our precious Pearl in the same way as those conscious of the value of sight would regard the apple of the eye. *Precious* is, therefore, an appropriate term when applied to one who, independent of any worldly consideration on our part, has made herself precious to us by her own inherent virtues. Yet we dare not indulge the hope of keeping the dear girl much longer. The day of separation may be one of joy to others, but it will be"—(Mr. Belman was here sensibly affected). "Let me drown the thought."

So saying, he emptied his wine-glass.

"But you must know, Ernest, my boy,

there are paternal as well as filial ties as sacred and profound, though formed from some novel accident in life, as any that were ever fostered on the parent hearth. Yet, after sixteen years of watchful devotion, that was never surpassed by parental love, we may be compelled to see the object of our solicitude married to some giddy lordling."

"But she would not, I suppose, marry any one for whom she has no regard?" said Ernest.

"Not *willingly*. Yet it sometimes happens that a young lady is induced to marry one for whom she has very little regard, from the simple fact of being prevented from marrying another for whom she may have a very great regard. But in five minutes I must be off," continued Mr. Belman, on replenishing his glass. "I've spent a very

pleasant day, and am very much indebted to you for an introduction to the admiral. The review was a grand sight, and the wonders of the arsenal presented a sight of equal grandeur. Farewell, Ernest, my boy. We shall be pleased to see you again during your travels. From the Isle of Wight we shall proceed westwards. I'll keep you posted up concerning our movements, and if I can in any way aid you in your desire to obtain a knowledge of the world, my services will always be at your command."

After *one glass more*, and a hearty shake of the hand, Mr. Belman took leave of Ernest the Wanderer.

Well! what is the total result of the meeting? *Nothing;* and concerning the matter on which I am anxious to be

enlightened, I'm as much in the dark as ever. But on another subject I shall presently be enlightened, no doubt. An expensive dinner and old port in the best private room of the best hotel, will make more than a trifling addition to my bill.

A frequent repetition of this will never do, Mr. Belman. I can't curtail my weekly allowance to poor Rosa through a fruitless endeavour to fathom the family history of Pearl. No, no, Mr. Belman! Though captivated by your lovely ward, and only conditionally engaged to Rosa for a time, my love for the one will never cause me to fail in my duty to the other.

But I must now despatch a sheet of current events for that rigorous guardian and banker, the Sentinel.

(*Letter* 3.)

"Portsmouth,
"June 21st:

"DEAR UNCLE,

"It is not every day that a foreign potentate pays a visit to Portsmouth. It is not every day that a great naval review takes place at Spithead, the oceanic rendezvous of men-of-war. Yet the double event has happened *to-day*.

"The review was a grand sight—grand even for a native, and must have appeared equally grand to a foreigner, unable to witness such a sight on a similar scale in his own country. Taken altogether, the effect of the display on the mind of a spectator—at least, on the mind of the Wanderer—was overwhelming.

"I speak of the *effect*. But in nature,

as well as in art, a novice may be staggered, if not stupified, by some *startling effects.* These are, of course, produced by a variety of means, and originate in various causes.

"To comprehend the means by which an effect is produced, and to trace the origin or cause of the productive power, would, I presume, be to obtain some little knowledge of any subject under consideration, whatever that subject might happen to be. A desire for such knowledge has prompted my movements on the present occasion. But on some things I am still provokingly in the dark, and a series of mysterious surprises have lately overtaken me on every side.

"By the kindness of that old friend of the family, Admiral Sir John Blue, I was to-day, in company with another old friend

of the family, admitted to the dockyard and arsenal, wherein about six thousand men are employed. Here, in presence of the distinguished foreigner previously alluded to, we were enabled to witness those marvellous operations with which you are doubtless familiar. The admiral *partly* promised to dine with me. But his absence led me to suppose that he *partly* promised somebody else, and that the more important part prevailed.

"Finally, I may observe that the *effect* of what I have seen and heard to-day has left on my mind a desire for change of occupation. Being unable to see my way to advancement through certain social mysteries, I should be glad to try my hand in a *public* capacity. To obtain distinction in this way, I should be ready to risk my personal convenience, even to the

extent of sacrifices made by a living object to whom my attention was this morning attracted. I saw a seemingly jolly and contented old warrior, who had lost both legs and one arm on the field of battle. He still contrives to obtain locomotion on a piece of board with four small wheels.

"This strange sight induced me to think that if—instead of the *trifling loss* of an arm, as you call it—you had met with a disaster like that of this legless wanderer, you might not have obtained so firm a footing in the good opinion of your brother, as fortunate people have less difficulty than unfortunate ones in enlisting sympathy.

"But, notwithstanding the perils of the battle-field, any patriotic young man would surely be ready to risk his life in defence

of his native land? And as I would much rather serve my country than my uncle, you will, I am sure, on public grounds, deem me justified, as the nephew of an '*old soldier*,' in signing myself a young

"VOLUNTEER.

"Colonel Stone, C.B.

"P.S.—Since the foregoing was written, my military aspiration has received a heavy and, I fear, a fatal blow. It has just occurred to me that the *system* by which you first secured a footing, and subsequently obtained promotion in the army, has been *abolished*. For an *un*qualified young man, it is an unfortunate thing that the passport to military glory has been changed from money to merit.

"Being thus prevented from asking you

to obtain for me (with my own money) a commission by *purchase*, I may be pardoned, under the necessity of continuing my provincial tramp, for directing your attention to a matter of personal interest.

"You are aware that in almost everything—honesty perhaps excepted—there has been a considerable rise in the world, and that the advance applies both to the commodities and the services of life. Not only have native oysters, but also native individuals—even maids of all wŏrk and working miners—gone up in price. At such a moment—a moment at which I am writing, by the aid of 'wax lights,' in the private room of a first-class hotel—would it be deemed an untimely period for the Wanderer to ask for an advance of wages?

"Hotel charges for delicacies are not always the most moderate items to be found in a traveller's note-book. I, this morning, heard that a sensitive young lady —a bride—had actually wept over the bridegroom's hotel bill. Should any dry sheet of mine be damped in a similar manner, I trust it may not be for the want of a crisp note from the neighbourhood of Threadneedle Street."



CHAPTER X.

FAMILY DESIGNS.

A LARGE dinner-party at the house of Sir Wily Wood was not an unusual occurrence; but that which had just taken place was remarkable for being on a scale of *unusual grandeur*. It was also noteworthy as having at the right hand of the host a gentleman on whom a favourable impression might possibly be made either by the sumptuous and varied character of the feast, or by the brilliant display of ancestral plate by which an imposing effect was produced.

The gentleman to whom was assigned the seat of honour on the occasion was Colonel Stone, while his nephew and niece happened to be seated in close proximity to the son and daughter of the host.

Of the repast itself it may be said that it produced the intended impression on the mind of one who was better qualified to judge of the nature of the entertainment than of the designing character of his recently-formed acquaintance, the entertainer.

"Well, Mabel," said Aunt Mary, as she was seated in company with her niece, engaged on fancy needlework, "I'm very pleased to think that the dinner last evening was a more successful and agreeable entertainment than any we have had for a long time past."

Aunt Mary was the maiden and matronly sister of the baronet. In household affairs she was the family autocrat whose word or even look had to be regarded by the domestics as law—law in a supreme court against which there was no appeal. Although an excellent sister to a designing brother, she could hardly be deemed a kind or considerate aunt to a motherless and undesigning niece. By gaslight or in evening dress, Aunt Mary's age could merely be conjectured by a hazardous guess, but by daylight, or in morning costume, it might be modestly fixed at some point in the vicinity of fifty-five.

"I consider Colonel Stone a very handsome man, although he has had the misfortune to lose an arm. His blunt manner and curt sentences are quite in keeping with military life, and the stamp of a brave

soldier is perceptible in his very bearing, Mabel," said Aunt Mary. "But what, child, was the object of his nephew's early visit this morning?"

"I should have supposed, aunt, after what I stated last week, that you might have *surmised* the object of his visit. You know the subject is not a very agreeable one," replied Mabel, rather coldly.

"I'm aware of that," continued the aunt, in her usual unamiable manner; "but you will soon have to settle the matter one way or other, and in your present position a mere surmise is not enough for one who is anxious to relieve you from your present dilemma."

"*Can* you relieve me, Aunt Mary?" But the joy that prompted the inquiry was of momentary duration. Mabel the next moment felt the utter impossibility of relief

by one who had been instrumental in creating the difficulty. "Oh, no, aunt, you may be anxious to afford me relief, but you have not the power to grant it."

"Don't be too sure of that, Mabel; but tell me—had the visitor any special object in seeing you this morning?"

"He had," was the emphatic and partial reply—a pause in which enabled the niece to subdue the conflict between anger and other disturbing elements—"He came to urge my acceptance of the suit that has caused me so much embarrassment, and that now makes me feel so very wretched."

"Silly girl," said the unfeeling aunt. "And this highly gifted young man received no encouragement from you beyond your former indecision. Is it so, Mabel?"

"It *is* so," said the niece, with a deep sigh; "yet, contrary to what you declare to be the wish of papa, I could hardly refrain from giving him the *cause* of my indecision."

"But you *did* refrain, did you not?" anxiously inquired the aunt. "I take that for granted. Therefore, Mabel, if you adopt the advice I gave you last week, the cause of your indecision will be quickly removed. Mr. Bond has only just left for India, and will be absent for nearly a year. This being the case, you can write by the next mail and release yourself from the engagement you accepted not more than three months ago. Such, I consider, would be a straightforward proceeding. It would insure your immediate freedom, so that there would be nothing whatever to reflect on your honour in any course you might be disposed to take."

"Really, Aunt Mary," said Mabel, with all the indignant force of which her gentle nature was capable, "you talk of the matter as if it were merely an arrangement between two persons for the delivery of a parcel of goods or a bale of cotton within a given time, and that a simple note would be sufficient to cancel the order."

"Very well, child," was the imperious reply. "In one sense—and a very important sense too—matrimony should be regarded strictly as a matter of business."

Restraining the inclination for an angry and audible expression from her feelings, Mabel said to herself,

"Oh, that a voice from the grave would guide me with the wise counsel of a departed and loving mother!"

"In *your* case, Mabel," continued the

aunt, "there is another point that should influence your decision, and if a mutual regard existed between you and Mr. Bond, I might have spoken somewhat less lightly of the engagement; but as the attachment is all on one side——"

"Can that free from responsibility any and every acceptance on the other side?" interrupted Mabel.

"Well, not exactly perhaps, without explanation," reluctantly admitted the aunt. "I mean not while either may be ignorant of its being a one-sided affair; but the fact, when known, should be quite sufficient to annul the engagement. And there is yet another point for your consideration, Mabel. Mr. Bond is thirty-six years of age, and you are not yet twenty-one. The difference is certainly *very great.*"

"I know it," replied the niece as the

tears rolled down her cheeks. "And *you* knew it, Aunt Mary, before to-day. You also knew that the difference in age was not my greatest objection. Yet I was assured—yes, I was *persuaded*, and at length induced to *believe* that time would reconcile me to one whose love was too sincere to be questioned. Forgive me, heaven, for a selfish desire! But if you and papa would kill me outright, I hope you'll adopt a more speedy process."

"You are too sensitive by half, child. Your papa and I were *then*, as we are *now*, deeply interested in your future welfare. But it has just come to light that commercial affairs in India are in a very critical state, and that any merchant of supposed means at the present moment might in less than twelve months be

entirely *without* means. Such is not an impossible event, even in the career of Mr. Bond."

"You well know, Aunt Mary, that I'm not at all qualified to form an opinion on such matters. But as an inducement for me to accept the offer of one whom I shall ever respect as a kind friend, did you not tell me of his willingness to settle a thousand a year on your niece?"

"You were told so as a simple fact, but that fact was not stated as an inducement to accept Mr. Bond's offer," insidiously replied that wily aunt who had previously represented the wealth of Mr. Bond as a strong point in the owner's favour. "No wonder, Mabel, that in your child-like simplicity concerning the material wants of life, you should display an

innocent kind of contempt for that by which those wants can alone be supplied. They say 'we can't put old heads on young shoulders,' but I've known some young shoulders with *very old* heads. With advancing years and knowledge you'll learn to value what you now disregard—you may take my word for that, Mabel. You'll find knowledge without substance something like the scent of another's meal to a hungry child. Although Mr. Bond informed your papa of his future intention to arrange a marriage settlement in your favour, we all know that a good intention is not like port wine that improves by keeping, and in human affairs that which is possible this year may be *impossible* in the next."

A sudden stop was here put to the dialogue. It often happens in life that

some unexpected—and *unwelcome because unexpected*—visitor may drop in at a very inopportune moment. It so happened in this case. Just as Aunt Mary, with all the natural artifice at her command, was engaged in what she believed—owing to Mabel's undisguised attachment for her new suitor—might prove a successful effort to subdue or extinguish in her niece a noble sense of honour towards the much-to-be-pitied Mr. Bond, the icy-hearted lady was interrupted by a visit from the sister of the accepted, but—*now*—almost discarded lover.

Aunt Mary's thoughts and wishes were sometimes in unison with her words and they were sometimes the very opposite, as circumstances might require. "Dear me, what an agreeable surprise!" she exclaimed as Miss Bond entered the room.

"Quite an unexpected pleasure. I thought you were enjoying the refreshing breezes of the Sussex coast; but it's not of course the fashionable season in Brighton just now?"

"The *fashionable* season I studiously avoid," replied Miss Bond. "They say that the King's Road at such a time is Rotten Row at the sea-side, and I've no taste for such giddy crowds, whether in town or in the country—what say you, Mabel? But what's the matter, dear,—are you not well?"

Fearing the conversation might possibly turn to the subject she wished to avoid, Mabel felt she would have given the world—had she possessed it—to be suddenly transported to some desolate spot therein. "I've a slight head-ache, Ellen, but can't say whether it proceeds from anything more serious."

"You must come and stay with us at Kemp Town for a few weeks. I'm quite certain you'll derive benefit from the change," said the visitor.

"I'm not so sure of that, Miss Bond," interposed Aunt Mary. "For *my* part I never feel well at Brighton."

"But Mabel is fond of sea-bathing, are you not, dear? Let me, however, make you acquainted with the chief object of my visit this morning."

The speaker here took a parcel from her reticule. As she proceeded to withdraw a small jewel-case from its paper covering, Mabel was forced to turn aside and relinquish the fancy-work on which she was engaged. She took up a book in order to conceal the nervous state into which she was thrown, by the fear of *another* to the long list of presents she

had already received from the visitor's brother.

"Had you been in town on the day Charles left for India," continued Miss Bond, "you would have received this present from his own hands. That, dear Mabel, might have increased the value of the gift, though it may now, I hope, be acceptable as a trifle that will remind you of the donor in his absence. There, dear!" added the visitor. "And I trust, both for your own sake and that of the giver, the contents may always be worn by you as symbols of joy."

Trembling and seemingly unconscious of her movements, Mabel, with a silent emotion as visible as the copious flow of tears from her eyes, took the jewel-case* from the hand of the visitor and placed

* Containing diamond ear-rings and brooch.

it—*unopened*—on the table before her. Even Aunt Mary appeared slightly disconcerted,—not merely through the unenviable situation of her niece, but the fear that Miss Bond, while ignorant of the real cause of Mabel's distress, might possibly attribute that distress to a feeling that had never assumed the form of its successor—*true love.*

"You must not give way to this depression," said Miss Bond, on taking a seat by the side of her whom she believed destined for her future sister-in-law. "If we were always favoured with the presence of those in the world for whom we entertain the greatest regard, what would be the consequence, Mabel? The answer is painfully evident at this moment. We should be unable to estimate their real worth in comparison with that of other

people, and you know, dear, that the absence of Charles on business is at present quite unavoidable."

"Ellen!" exclaimed Mabel as if suddenly roused from her despondency by a resistless impulse, "tell your brother I am altogether unworthy of his kindness."

"I cannot possibly tell him anything so contrary to my belief, Mabel."

"Then your belief, Ellen, is contrary to—"

Again overcome by her feelings, Mabel was unable to complete the sentence.

"The truth is, Miss Bond," said Aunt Mary, "my niece has no wish either to mislead you or for you to mislead yourself concerning these acts of kindness on the part of your brother. I may, therefore, in a most friendly way, inform you that

her papa has a decided objection to her receiving *any* gifts except at the time of marriage, and of course as wedding presents."

The familiar sound of the *muster-gong* is heard.

"A welcome summons!" continued Aunt Mary. "Come, Miss Bond, you must join us at luncheon. We'll leave the discussion on love and lovers for some future occasion."



CHAPTER XI.

THE BARONET AND HIS CREDITORS.

SIR WILY WOOD, BARONET. In white letters, distinctly visible without the aid of an eye-glass, the above words appeared on a large black case that contained the title deeds of a man in difficulties—one unable at the moment to pay his creditors *twenty shillings in the pound.*

That case had for a great number of years occupied a prominent position in the office of Mr. Sharp, the family lawyer. The contents had just been examined in

order to ascertain whether there remained any unappropriated security on which money might be immediately raised to satisfy the pressing claims of certain clamorous creditors.

"Well, Sharp," said Sir Wily Wood, on entering the private office of one whom he had reason to regard both as a friend and adviser, "has the examination of the documents been productive, or furnished the promise of a fruitful result?"

"Not to the extent of a single shilling, as everything appears to have been mortgaged on which a shilling could be raised," replied Mr. Sharp.

"That's unfortunate, *very* unfortunate. "How am I to get out of the present *fix*, my friend?" anxiously inquired Sir Wily.

"I can see no chance of relief, except

through a composition," replied the lawyer.

"A composition!" loudly exclaimed the client. "The vaguest rumour of such an event would be the ruin of *everything*."

"But as everything appears in ruin already," said the lawyer, with a smile, "I don't exactly see the force of your remark, my friend."

"You must be *enlightened*," said Sir Wily, in a subdued tone, drawing his chair near Mr. Sharp. "About two months ago you procured for me the particulars of a certain will—the will of a merchant named John Stone. By that document it would appear that the eldest son of the deceased will be entitled to nearly a million of money, and——"

"Not till his marriage with a suitable partner," interrupted Mr. Sharp.

"Precisely," continued Sir Wily. "And do you remember having at my last dinner party met a young man of the name of Stone?"

"I've a perfect recollection of the young gentleman, and I also remember that he occupied a seat next to your daughter."

"That young man is the eldest son of the late merchant and millionaire."

"The deuce he is!" said the lawyer in surprise. "Then if his merits be on a par with his wealth, I should think your accomplished daughter would be a very suitable partner for him."

"You know, friend Sharp," said Sir Wily, "I always gave you credit for a quick or sagacious perception of no com-

mon order, and in this case your opinion happens to accord with that of the young man himself. He considers that my daughter, as you justly observe, would make him a *very* suitable partner."

"So far so good," critically observed the lawyer. "But what becomes of Mr. Bond, who was to have settled a thousand a year on your daughter?"

"Why," said Sir Wily, confusedly, "the truth is, Sharp, we have discovered *that* to be a very one-sided affair, and that Mabel had no real—I don't say regard, but no real affection for Mr. Bond."

"Poor Mabel!" feelingly exclaimed the lawyer. "I commiserate her motherless position. Mrs. Sharp considers her one of the most charming girls in the universe, and let me tell you, Wood, that my wife

is not, as a rule, inclined to extol the virtues of her own sex."

"If Mabel is to be judged by a delicate sense of honour in her view of right and wrong, any parent might be proud of such a daughter, and I *am* proud of her, and am delighted at the prospect of her being united to a young man after her own heart. But in sporting phraseology, I may add—*barring accidents.* And this throws me back to the difficulties of *my own* position. Have you summoned the malcontents, Sharp?"

"To the number of about twenty of the most clamorous, and they'll be here in half-an-hour," said the lawyer, on looking at his watch.

"Remember," returned the client with emphasis, "don't hint at such a thing as a composition, but simply ask for time."

"In that respect I've made it all right with Brown, and also with Martin."

"What about Lawson?"

"*Doubtful*," was the reply.

"And Jacob Hunter?"

"*Ditto.* Still you may calculate on three or four in your favour, and these will give a tone to the meeting, and may possibly carry our point. But there's a judgment creditor, and you must of course fail to put in an appearance."

"You may be sure I'll not fail in that respect. In fact I'm now in Paris—or *supposed to be*," replied Sir Wily.

"And in this room you'll be perfectly safe, while I attend your friends in the outer office. If your brother-in-law, the earl, would become security, I should have little difficulty in obtaining time."

"Not a sou to be obtained in that quarter," said Sir Wily. "I've neither seen nor corresponded with the earl for the last two years."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Sharp, "I'm sadly afraid, Wood, that this racing business of yours has not only lost you large sums of money, but also many valuable friends."

"You're aware that my horse lost the Derby only by a short head?" said Sir Wily.

"I'm aware that it would require a very long head to make sure of anything where there is so much uncertainty."

"Yet I feel certain that Lucifer will win me the St. Leger, and again place a large balance at my bankers."

On receiving through the speaking-tube from below a message that all the gentle-

men named on the list of expected creditors had arrived, Mr. Sharp left his client and proceeded to the meeting.

Lord Harkaway was the only nobleman present, although there were several well-known sportsmen.

The room at this moment presented a curious and diversified picture. In one corner had gathered a knot of five or six turf companions. They were talking so loudly on sporting affairs, that the lawyer on his entrance was unnoticed, or if noticed, he was for a time unheeded.

In another corner sat a couple of sadly silent and elderly men, each with a serious expression of countenance, that seemed to anticipate bad news in the form of "ten," or "five shillings in the pound," or even less.

In the centre of the room stood the mis-

cellaneous body, some of whom were trying to arrange for a concerted plan of action, in the event of any unacceptable proposition being submitted for their acceptance. But amongst this body, the two or three favourable and one or two doubtful creditors, made any uniform line of action impossible.

"I'll lay two to one we don't get more than ten shillings in the pound," said one friend to another in the betting corner.

"I'll take five to two," was the reply.

"You shall have it," said his friend.

"I can lay an even ten-pound note we don't get five shillings in the pound," said a third.

"Done!" replied a fourth.

The general conversation and noise was now silenced by the lawyer. In order to make himself seen and heard, Mr. Sharp ascended and spoke from a form at the end of the office.

"In opening the business of the present meeting, it is necessary, gentlemen, that I should briefly refer to one or two facts with which some of you are familiar. You are aware that, however large may have been the gains or losses of Sir Wily Wood, he has hitherto most promptly and honourably discharged all his obligations."

"We don't dispute that," said a surly creditor.

"You are also aware that the present embarrassment of my client dates only from the last Derby day."

"This ain't to the point," said another.

"What's the object?" inquired a third.

"Gentlemen!" exclaimed Mr. Sharp, with marked emphasis, "if those who expect a dozen questions answered in a breath will only exercise a little patience"—("hear, hear," and cheers from the friendly creditors)—"I will endeavour, in a very few words, to explain the position as well as the desire of my client, and I hope the explanation will satisfy those now present." (Cries of "Oh!" "hear, hear," and cheers.) "I am happy to inform you, gentlemen, that in the opinion of my client, his difficulties are only of a temporary character." ("Hear, hear.") "He has, therefore, no intention either to offer or to ask his creditors to accept anything less than twenty shillings in the pound." (General cheers, with a cry of "Bravo,

Wood!") "This being the case, gentlemen, you will no doubt grant the only favour he has to solicit at your hands—*time?*"

"With security, of course?" said a creditor.

"Really, gentlemen," continued Mr. Sharp, with a smile, and with an inward sense of satisfaction at the favourable appearance of matters, "I think, after some of you have been speculating and betting odds against the chance of obtaining ten, or even five shillings in the pound"—(loud cheers from friendly creditors, and laughter by the speculators)—"you ought to be satisfied with the full amount of your respective claims"—(renewed cheers)—"especially when I tell you that, in asking your indulgence for six months, he wishes me to say that interest will be paid

on each debt, dating from the day it became due." (Cries of "Good! very good!" and cheers.) "I am, however, compelled to add, gentlemen, that without perfect unanimity, the offer will have to be withdrawn, as I have advised my client not to favour by early settlement the claims of any clamorous creditor or creditors to the disadvantage of more generous or considerate ones." (Cheers, and a cry of "Capital advice!") "Are you all agreed, gentlemen?" (A loud and general response of "All!") "Then you will please to signify the same in the usual manner, in order to prevent a doubt on the subject. Those who agree to the proposition of my client will kindly hold up their hands." (Many replied by holding up both hands.) "On the contrary, gentlemen." (Not a hand was raised.)

"Carried unanimously." (Loud cheers.) "It will, therefore, afford me much pleasure to make my client acquainted with the result of a meeting, the business of which is now at an end."

In the midst of the usual noise and bustle caused by the dispersion of a meeting, Lord Harkaway was heard to say to a betting man—

"I can back Lucifer for the St. Ledger."

"You may have five hundred to sixty, my lord," said a man, who had the appearance of *anything* but a gentleman.

"Make it ten to one, and you may double the bet," replied his lordship.

A bet of "one thousand to one hundred" against Lucifer for the St. Ledger was duly made and booked, and Lord

Harkaway and others, after shaking hands with Mr. Sharp, left the office for their respective ways, pastimes, or occupations.



CHAPTER XII.

AUNT MARY'S PLOT.

AUNT Mary had an accommodating conscience. In that respect she was not alone in the world. An accommodating conscience, with a compensating balance to justify an act by the motive, is an individual inheritance on the part of a large number of either sex. Like some metallic substance affected by the atmospheric opposites of heat and cold, its expansion or contraction corresponds with the influence of the moment. It may be compared to a

convertible carriage that can be opened or closed at convenience according to the state of the weather.

To seek a desirable object through questionable means would be deemed perfectly justifiable by any one with an accommodating conscience. That it was so regarded by Aunt Mary will be made manifest by the mode of action she adopted for the attainment of a desirable end. Mabel, her artless niece, possessed a mind of the most delicate or refined sensibility. Her heart, moreover, had imbibed for her unaccepted suitor a love of exquisite purity. But in the glorious sunshine of its unproclaimed devotion that heart was now and then overshadowed by little clouds that still, with a lowering aspect, floated above the horizon. These depressing vapours originated or were

mainly produced by the early designs and family influence of Aunt Mary. To dispel the sad effect occasioned by a spirit of her own creation was now the chief aim of Aunt Mary. But the means employed for the accomplishment of her object were such as could be alone adopted by a lady with a *very* accommodating conscience.

A change of servants in the domestic part of Sir Wily Wood's establishment happened to be a thing of common occurrence. But a simultaneous notice of dismissal to all the domestics, was rather an unusual affair. Yet such a notice had just been served on each and every one of the household staff, from the little page boy up to the portly butler, and from the matronly housekeeper down to the merry scullery-maid. All were required to leave the establishment on one and the same day.

"What's the object, Kate?" said John the footman to the housemaid as they sat with other servants at breakfast. "I sha'n't fret about leaving, as I intended to give the beauty notice myself, but I'm rather curious about one thing: I should like to know her reason for turning out the lot all in a body—just as if we was no better than a drove of cattle to be sent for sale on a market day."

"I s'pose they're going to shut up the house altogether," replied Kate. "Or perhaps the lies you've been telling for master is about to become true. May be, John, he's going abroad in *earnest.*"

"May be he is, Kate, if being off his legs and all to pieces means *going abroad.*"

"He's got over that stumble," said the

coachman. "Lord Harkaway's trainer told me that though thrown on the Derby, he's now in the saddle again, and that he expects Lucifer to go in for the St. Leger in a buster."

"Well," replied John, "we've all to clear out long afore then."

"For *my* part I ain't sorry," said the cook. "Places is plentiful, and good missuses ain't so *wery* scarce I'm a thinkin'. Howsever, as we can't get a wuss, the chances is the next may be ounces better 'an the present wixen."

"But won't Miss Mabel be sorry to lose her maid?" said Kate.

"Ann will be quite as sorry to go," replied the cook. "Our young missus is the only one among 'em as its a pleasure to wait on. As for that bouncible

aunt of hers — was you told by the beauty—"

"A beauty without paint," interrupted Kate.

"Didn't she say as how servants now-a-days is too knowing?—Just as if its possible for servants to know too much."

"I guess it *is* possible for such as her," said the coachman. "And that's why she wants a clear out, so as to get them as knows a little less about their affairs. She don't intend to tell the new ones that clever trick as allowed master to be abroad when at the same time he was giving a grand dinner party at home. There's no doubt many other things as she don't want 'em to know, 'specially as she's so wery knowing herself."

This discussion on the personal pecu-

liarities of the family was followed by an event the knowledge of which might have justified the retiring domestics in critical observations of a still more uncomplimentary character.

Aunt Mary had arranged for a private interview with a female to whom—if a strange proposition should find acceptance—she intended to assign a part that would involve deception, difficulty and danger.

"Take a seat, Pinfold!" said the plotting lady who, in morning attire, was seated reading a newspaper. The clock had just sounded the final stroke of twelve. "Punctuality in keeping an appointment is very commendable, and you are punctual to the minute." Charlotte Pinfold, a young woman of pleasing appearance and manners, had just entered the room.

"Draw your chair nearer the table, as I wish to have a little quiet conversation with you on a confidential matter. I called on Lady Lovegrove, who gave you an excellent character. I find that you lived nearly three years in the situation, and her ladyship, it seems, would have been pleased to take you with her on the Continent. But you object to go abroad, do you not?"

"I should much prefer remaining in England," softly replied Charlotte Pinfold.

"I can quite understand *that*, as Lady Lovegrove made me fully acquainted with your position, and this will of course account for your wish to remain at home. You seem surprised at my knowing this? But her ladyship would hardly have furnished me with the particulars, had I not declared my intention to engage you

on certain conditions, to be settled between ourselves. As the statement relative to the mishap was a voluntary one on your part when you engaged with her ladyship, you would not, I presume, wish to keep the knowledge of the affair from *me?*"

"I should have told you *everything* before entering your service," replied the young woman, with emotion.

"Everything, I suppose, but that which you kept from her ladyship," continued the wily inquisitor. "It appears that you declined to give the name or to say a word concerning the *father* of your child?"

At this question the young woman seemed greatly distressed, and had much difficulty in suppressing a rising tear.

"But don't for a moment suppose that I'm curious on that point. On the con-

trary, I think more highly of you for your desire to screen from disgrace one who has brought disgrace on *you*, and who is no doubt the greater sinner of the two. Your little boy, I'm told, is seven years old, and as you are now only six-and twenty, you must have been unfortunate when you were about eighteen years of age? That, indeed, was a sad blight on your prospect in life."

The young woman could no longer restrain her feelings. She wept bitterly. Her cruel interrogator brought from the sideboard some sherry and biscuits, and placed a glass of wine before the girl, who was unable at the moment to partake of the same.

"I may tell you, Charlotte Pinfold, that I already feel an interest in your poor child, and I shall be glad to do what I

can to promote the future welfare of its unfortunate mother."

"I'm sure, ma'am, I—I shall be very—very grateful to you," sobbed the mother.

"Compose yourself, my girl, and take a little wine and a biscuit," said the insidious plotter. "We will then turn to another and more pleasing subject; for I'm quite disposed to engage you as maid to my niece, and will presently enter into particulars."

Aunt Mary left the room for a few minutes. On her return, she found that Charlotte Pinfold had partaken of refreshment, and had apparently regained the desired composure.

"My niece, you must know, is a favourite with most people," said the aunt, on seating herself near the applicant for the

proposed situation. "Her present maid, who will leave in a few days, is about to be married, and this brings me at once to the confidential communication I am about to make. Mabel—that's the name of my niece—was some time ago engaged to be married to a gentleman old enough to be her father; but we have since discovered that the difference in age is by no means the most serious objection to the union. In fact, she has no real love for the man."

"Indeed, ma'am! And 'twould be a sad thing for your niece to marry one she doesn't love," innocently observed Charlotte Pinfold.

"It would, indeed," continued Aunt Mary. "And it has just occurred to me that you might greatly aid us in making known other objections to the gentleman,

and thereby turn her thoughts entirely and for ever from the subject. You have already told me that previous to the time you lived with Lady Lovegrove, you were several years with the family of Captain Black ?"

"I lived with the family, I think, nearly five years, ma'am," said the girl, with hesitation.

"Just so," continued her future mistress. "But whether the family title should be supposed by others to be Black or White, or some other name, would be a matter of little moment to *you*, I suppose ?"

"Well, ma'am," replied the young woman, in her natural ignorance concerning such a question, "I don't exact know what you mean by some *other* name."

"My meaning shall be made clear,

When in waiting on my niece as her maid, you would, I presume, have no objection to lead her to suppose that you once lived with a family whose name I will in due course give you ?"

"I don't see, ma'am, what's the object of doing *that*, and I should be very sorry to tell an untruth," said the young woman, the expression of whose countenance corresponded with the serious tone of her reply.

"I should be equally sorry to suppose you a down-right story-teller, as a falsehood for a wicked purpose could only proceed from a wicked person. But I must tell you, Charlotte Pinfold, that there are times and occasions in life when *any* deed —even murder itself—may lose its fearful title in an act of justification. You may well shudder at my words; and as

you may not understand law terms, I will explain to you what is meant by *justifiable homicide.* Suppose, for instance, that your widowed mother, yourself, and your little boy resided together in a lonely cottage, and suppose some monster had entered with the intention of killing the entire family; and suppose, further, that either of you, in order to save the life of all, had shot the man dead the moment he raised his arm for his deadly purpose. A jury of your country would declare that act to be *justified,* and would commend rather than condemn the deed."

"I can quite understand *that,* ma'am," said Charlotte Pinfold.

"I'm glad to hear you say so; and if such an act can cease to be regarded as murder, I wish to satisfy you that falsehood, *under certain circumstances,* might

be equally justified by the occasion. Suppose you beheld a distracted and beautiful girl on the point of throwing herself into a river, or adopting some other means of self-destruction. To save the life of the fair one, would you not feel yourself justified in declaring to the bystanders that the stranger was mad ?"

"Certainly I should," replied Charlotte Pinfold, with emphasis; "because I think any one who would commit suicide must be *really mad.*"

"Very true," continued the cunning philosopher. "Yet the mind of man or woman may be disturbed by something, the continued existence of which would make even life itself a slow process of suicide. In such a case we should be justified in any step likely to transform the cause of pain or sorrow into a lasting

source of pleasure. Let me make my meaning clear, by saying it is possible to make some sad accident or serious mistake in life the very means of future joy. Your own case will still further illustrate the subject. Lady Lovegrove tells me that, although your early misfortune has been a heavy tax on your limited means; yet in the living issue of that mishap, your very existence appears centred, and that your child is an object of the most motherly affection."

By this touching and personal allusion, the speaker at once enlisted sympathy in favour of her doctrine, and Charlotte Pinfold was again compelled to have recourse to her pocket-handkerchief.

"I'm quite sure," added the plausible sophist, "that any interest I may be disposed to take in your child will be duly

appreciated by the mother; and should the little fellow live to grow up, my brother, Sir Wily Wood, might place him in a position to earn a respectable living. In return for this, you will not—I know you will not—be ungrateful. Beyond this, I will at present merely observe that we hope to devise some plan for the dispersion of a family cloud, and for making the future life of my niece a happy one. Now you will no doubt be glad, by any means in your power, to aid us in our endeavour?"

"If that's your object, ma'am, I shall be most happy to say or do anything you may suggest," replied Charlotte Pinfold.

"And by so doing you will prove yourself a friend as well as the personal attendant of my niece. It will be ten days

before a change takes place in our household, but in the interval I will write and appoint a time for you to call on me. We will then decide on the course you are to pursue when you enter on your duties. At present I will only say that in the event of Miss Mabel—your future young mistress—getting married, I shall be happy to make you our housekeeper, unless my niece should wish to retain your services."

With this understanding, Aunt Mary and Charlotte Pinfold parted.



CHAPTER XIII.

ERNEST, THE WANDERER, AT WEYMOUTH.

TWO letters in one day for the wanderer may be termed a *rare event.* Let me see what the Sentinel has to say—as he seldom says much—before I turn to the more interesting epistle of the two.

"Belgrave Square,
"June 27th.

"DEAR ERNEST,

"You ask me to increase your pay. The request is granted. As it will save

trouble, and be more convenient to both, I shall henceforth remit monthly instead of weekly. Enclosed you will find a draft for £50 for the ensuing month, according to the increased rate of allowance by

"Your faithful uncle and guardian,

"STEPHEN STONE.

"Mr. Ernest Stone."

Marvellous and unexpected fortune! An advance of ten pounds a month—and by a single stroke of the pen. Capital! *capital* in every way, although taken from that to which I am entitled. But let me see what the little lamb has to say to her faithful — may I not almost say *faithless* or *inconstant?*—shepherd.

"Laurel House, Brompton,
"June 27th.

"MY DEAR ERNEST,

"This, as you are aware, is our vacation. All the boarders except a foreign young lady and myself are either with their friends at home, or enjoying their society on their annual excursions. But your sister has made arrangements for me to continue my studies during the long holidays, and this will no doubt meet your approbation, as I always have the privilege of going home from Saturday afternoon till Monday morning.

"Music and French are the great difficulties I have to contend with. In the former I have made some little progress, but scarcely any with the latter. Maria says that a pupil will never succeed with *any* subject for which there is no *real love.*

I certainly have not much love for French, but the music-master is polite enough to say I ought to play tolerably well at the end of two years.

"I may mention another little difficulty, although it has been nearly overcome. This establishment is a *fashionable one*, and the pupils (with *one* solitary exception) are the daughters of fashionable people. '*Mother*' is a term altogether foreign to their ideas, and if they heard me speak of *my mother* I should be deemed unsuited to their society. Yet the difficulty I have experienced in learning to talk of '*my mamma*,' has been almost as great as that of learning my first French lesson. I have now, however, become familiar with a term which at first provoked a little laughter on the part of my forsaken *mother*.

"In the present letter, dear Ernest, or rather in the unfinished portion thereof, I must address you without an assumption of *any* kind. Were I to be other than *natural* you would never forgive me, and I should never deserve to be forgiven. Conscious of this fact I will first refer to *mother*.

"My mother, in reflecting on the position in which by your kindness we have been placed, is still excited by feelings of an opposite character. With a parental regard for you that is scarcely exceeded by her love for me, she considers that the recipients of your weekly bounty are little better than *objects of charity*. Your dear sister tries to impart a different aspect to the affair, but mother cannot help sighing for a more independent state of existence.

"Let me now refer to the daughter.

In the first and *only* letter received from you since you left home, there are two or three rather obscure but very significant observations. These, dear Ernest, suggest the only remarks I shall at present make concerning *my own* feelings. With a view of promoting my welfare in every possible way, you say, '*I shall be happy to relieve you from the obligation under which you were placed before my departure from London.*' For this considerate offer of release you afford me the following reason :—'*It would be a cruel thing on my part to expect you to wait two years for the solution of a question involving so much uncertainty.*' Such are your words.

"As the supposed cruelty on *your* part has only been discovered since you left town, am I to assume that it would be equally cruel on *my* part to wish you to

remain two years in a state of uncertainty? But you are aware of being under no such obligation *to me.* Had you been so placed, I don't think you would have received so sudden and so unexpected an offer of release—even had the question remained doubtful more than two years.

"Should I, dear Ernest, have unintentionally misconstrued your meaning, you must attribute the error to my want of education in what your brother calls '*natural philosophy.*' But as you wish me to gain knowledge on all matters calculated to promote my future welfare, I have no doubt that on a subject of the deepest interest to an anxious pupil you will still further enlighten your simple-minded yet ever grateful

"ROSA.

"Mr. Ernest Stone."

Well done, Rosa! Two years on the ornamental branches of learning will qualify you for the wife of a Greek philosopher—if not for the consort of your present wavering friend. But neither mother nor daughter shall ever want a shilling while Ernest Stone has a florin in hand. So much for the material part of the business. The spiritual part, or whatever else it may be called, is not so easily disposed of. Love is a kind of romance, after all—a composition of the gods to excite and perplex one's feelings. The heart is no sooner captivated by one luminary than a second appears by which the first is partially, if not entirely, eclipsed. What's the object of the insidious Cupid in trifling with one in this way? I must fish it out. The mysterious Pearl is a native of Devon, and in the presence—

would I could say in the *absence*—of her guardians I shall shortly have the pleasure of passing a few hours in her agreeable society. Meanwhile let me discharge my duty in a letter to the Sentinel, by whom my follies are reproved and my studies rewarded with—*my own money!*

(*Letter* 4.)

"Weymouth,
"June 28th.

"DEAR UNCLE,

"Although partial to the sea, my present occupation, as you are aware, precludes me from indulging that partiality beyond a distant view of waves that are even more restless than the feet of the wanderer. Yet, by the region from which this letter is dated, you will observe that the borders of the ocean are still selected

for my early labours. The reason may hereafter be made manifest.

"The principal houses in this popular watering-place are those facing the bay. They form a very imposing frontage, while the Esplanade—a promenade of nearly a mile in length—is one of the most attractive features in Weymouth.

"Three miles from here is the Portland Breakwater. At the cost of a million of money and the labour of a vast number of men during a period of twenty-three years, this submarine mountain was raised, and now constitutes a work of national importance. It is about one hundred feet high, and three hundred feet in diameter at the base, forming a wall of stone nearly a mile and a half long. Yet the foundation and the main portions of this marvellous structure are invisible to the human

eye. They lie beneath the surface of the ocean.

"On one occasion you expressed a wish that, in my endeavour to obtain a 'knowledge of the world,' my labours should be divided between the study of man—you did not say *woman*—the works of man and the works of nature.

"It seems only fair to assume that you meant *man* in the compound application of the term. Neither would it be unreasonable to infer that the *good* as well as the bad features of man are within the legitimate scope for study by the student.

"If the inferences are correct, is not the unseen part of that mighty work just named a silent symbol of a noble feature in human nature? Charity, we are told, is the highest gift of God, and the noblest

attribute of man. Yet the greatest acts of charity are invisible to the world at large. Like the great Creator they are silent and unseen. Then do they not in some way reflect, or are they not in some way reflected by that great work beneath the surface of the ocean? My meaning may be more clearly explained by a single and simple illustration.

"From an unobserved spot in a field adjoining a publie thoroughfare, I, this morning, beheld a labouring man and a boy seat themselves on a log of wood by the road-side, in order to partake of their mid-day meal.

"In a few moments a thinly-clad and half-starved looking lad, on passing by, cast a supplicating glance at the diners and a longing look at the dinners. But a threatening order of 'be off!' from the

senior feeder was promptly obeyed by the wandering supplicant.

"Presently the adult labourer rose from his seat, and entered an adjoining public-house for his 'drop of beer.' His boy—embracing an opportunity at a moment he supposed no one saw him—ran to the retreating little mendicant, and, after giving him half his dinner, hastily returned and resumed his seat.

"The sight of that silent act on the part of the youthful labourer seemed in an instant to touch a sensitive spot in your nephew's breast. The heart, I believe, never fails in its response to the most gentle touch of nature. It only fails when insensible to touch: for where there is no sense there can be no feeling. A tear, and more than one, had already damped the wanderer's cheeks. It is

therefore hoped that the present sheet may not be considered as altogether a *dry* one.

"In conclusion, I must not omit to thank you for a timely increase of pay. The addition will enable me to contribute my mite to any neglected and deserving object—male or female—whose dependence on others may occasion distress in *many* ways. But as love and charity are supposed to go hand-in-hand, policy as well as prudence on a delicate subject would justify me in closing the matter with the well-known truism, of the 'least said the soonest ended,' by

"Your deeply sensitive nephew,

"ERNEST STONE.

"Colonel Stone, C.B."



CHAPTER XIV.

AUNT MARY'S PLOT—SECOND STAGE.

THERE is no fixed or stationary period in the onward course of life. Everything must continue to advance, although—paradoxical as it may appear—many things, crab-like, may at the same time be going backward.

Each and every worldly matter pertaining to the establishment of Sir Wily Wood seemed progressing to the satisfaction of all concerned. Family clouds had been dispersed, and the surrounding

atmosphere was again clear and genial. The social fruit of peace and prosperity appeared to be gradually, if not rapidly ripening, even although an unsuspected little worm, in its unseen and incipient state, should be preparing for the work of destruction.

Between Aunt Mary and her niece there has been something to produce a marked change of sentiment. The difference is almost as great as that between zero and summer heat. Their bearing towards each other was cold and distant. It is now warm and affectionate. Mabel in her girlish innocence had never attributed to Aunt Mary anything beyond an *error in judgment.* But when the aunt's persuasive power had induced the niece to accept for her future partner a man for whom she had no real love, a

natural coolness, if not a positive dislike, gradually sprang up in the mind of Mabel.

The case is now altered. Aunt Mary, without assigning a reason for her advice, desires absolute forgetfulness relating to Mr. Bond, and the niece has discovered what she believes good ground for an endeavour to forget her accepted lover. Hence her feeling of thankfulness for the kind advice given by her Aunt Mary.

Seymour, the giddy member for Closeboro', was one evening desirous of interrogating his sister on a certain subject. But it so happened—as it had often happened before — that the House of Commons was expected to divide on an important question, and that the party "whip" had been very urgent in his

claim on doubtful or easy-going members.

"Ten o'clock, by Jingo!" said the absent member on entering the room, in which his aunt and sister were seated. "I don't often trouble the House with my presence, but having promised to be within call on the division to-night, I must soon be off." As a singular mode of proving his desire to *be off*, the speaker—as was often his wont when in a sportive humour—made a spring by which he seated himself on a corner of the table. "You must know, Mabel, that of all the young ladies I ever met—and I've met a good many—your friend, Miss Stone, happens to be the most remarkable."

"Remarkable in what way, Seymour?" said Mabel, with an evident touch of

curiosity occasioned by her brother's observation.

"Well, I don't exactly know in what way she's remarkable, except that she *is* remarkable." Crossing his legs and suddenly reclining with his elbow on the table and his head on his hand, the speaker's hat lost its balance and fell to the floor. "Just so," continued the uncovered senator, "I am thus reminded by the distance between me and my chapeau of the manner of your friend, Miss Stone, who can be either very friendly or disagreeably distant."

"Such a peculiarity of manner, Seymour, may arise from various causes. Maria is not the only young lady by whom it has been practised."

"That's *very* true," softly interposed Aunt Mary.

"And in *your* case, Seymour," continued the sister, "I can quite understand Maria's courteous yet distant bearing. As the brother of one for whom I believe she has a sincere regard, you are, of course, treated with due consideration. At the same time you should know that Maria has a great aversion to anyone inclined to flirtation."

"*Flirtation?*" repeated Seymour, with a loud laugh. "I always regarded *that* as a feature the frail sex inherited from their mother, Eve. I hope Miss Stone doesn't look upon your brother as the flagrant copyist of a woman's rights?"

"Strange events in life are sometimes revealed in a strange manner," was the sister's significant reply.

"That also is *very* true," again interrupted Aunt Mary.

"You may remember your recent visit to the Royal Academy?" continued Mabel.

At this pointed question from a forbearing sister, the brother's ears—his only blushing quarters—by their crimson hue, returned an unwilling but instant affirmative.

"On that occasion, Seymour, your marked attention to an *animate* picture not *by*, but *in* the person of a foreign female artiste——"

"Pooh!" exclaimed the excited brother who, in a fit of irritation produced by shame and chagrin, suddenly sprang from the table. "A mere picture of *your* fanciful imagination! Some sister sobersides has led you astray, Mabel. But I must be off, or the division in the House will have taken place before my arrival."

So saying, the member for Closeboro' picked up and replaced his hat and hastily left the room, in order to attend his duties in the House of Commons.

"I'm inclined to think, Mabel, dear," said the designing aunt, "that Seymour's flirtation, as you term it, is nothing more than innocent playfulness.

"It may be so, Aunt Mary, but one can hardly regard innocence as the natural associate of frivolity. It's not long ago that Seymour induced Florence Ford to believe he was desperately in love with her, though he now makes light of, and even scorns the idea of such a thing."

"There may be unknown reasons to justify *that*, as there are to justify many *other* things: and you'll admit that Miss Stone is in every way superior to Florence Ford?"

"In quickness of perception Maria is certainly in advance of Florence," replied Mabel. "Even the blunt colonel is severe on Seymour's flippant and giddy manner."

"Colonel Stone, my dear, is severe on everything and *everybody*," said Aunt Mary.

"Yet I've heard that rough ground is less dangerous than a slippery surface," replied Mabel. "Seymour often says he can see through people, but however deep he may be in *that* way, I believe the Sentinel, as he is called, can *see through* Seymour. At all events, it's not a pleasant thing, even when the colonel calls me his 'pet,' to hear one's own brother ironically alluded to as 'the brilliant member for Closeboro'.'"

Charlotte Pinfold, the new maid to

Mabel, entered the room with some needlework on which she had been engaged. After delivering the same to her young mistress she again retired.

"You find Pinfold a very handy and intelligent person, do you not, Mabel?" inquired Aunt Mary.

"Exceedingly so," was the reply.

"I was strongly impressed in her favour," added the aunt. "But highly-glazed characters are so often given and so little to be depended on now-a-days, that one can't always rely on a strong recommendation from persons of the highest respectability."

"Ah, me!" sighed the niece, "how often in high places is that word *respectability* misapplied? Yet in one respect it seems a most providential thing that this unfortunate and much to be pitied young woman should have applied here for a situation."

"Providence, my dear, usually aids those who merit a helping hand," remarked the philosopher.

"But I'm quite sure, Aunt Mary, if you had been previously familiar with all I told you this morning, you never would have engaged Pinfold at all."

"Perhaps not, Mabel, unless Providence had interceded in the poor girl's behalf. Did she tell you how long she had lived in Mr. Bond's establishment before she went to reside with Lady Lovegrove?"

Deeply absorbed in her own thoughts, Mabel failed for a moment to follow the inquisitor. "What did you say, Aunt Mary?"

The latter repeated her former question, when the niece in a slow and contemplative strain replied,

"Pinfold tells me she lived nearly

five years in the establishment of Mr. Bond."

"How very remarkable," said the aunt, with a feigned expression of surprise. "But surely, my dear, she didn't cast the shadow of a reflection on the master of the house?"

"Pinfold made no direct imputation on the character of any one, and when she discovered the high esteem in which I held Mr. Bond, and that my inference from her evasive answers was a reflection on that gentleman's honour, she became greatly distressed."

Aunt Mary could only with difficulty conceal her painful anxiety for the stability of one on whose individual action the success of her plot depended.

"Of course, Mabel, you didn't question the poor girl concerning the paternity of her child?"

"Yes; the excitement of the moment compelled me to ask her for the father's name.* The request was fruitless and the result painful. In a tremulous voice and bitter anguish the resolute mother replied, 'I should be very sorry, Miss Mabel, to say that Mr. Bond *is* the father of the child.' Perceiving the conclusion I drew from this evasion, the poor creature fell on her knees, wept bitterly, and begged me in the name of Heaven to forgive her, if she had said or done anything likely to cause me future pain. But when I assured her that in one sense the revelation would relieve my mind of a serious burden, she became more composed, and I promised the

* Although it was never disclosed, an incident in Pinfold's history will in due time convince the reader that her late master was *not* her seducer.

broken-hearted mother that I would never again refer to the painful subject."

"God bless you, my dear niece, for your noble resolve!" loudly exclaimed Aunt Mary, whose relief at this moment may be compared to that felt by a culprit reprieved while the bell tolled the hour for execution. "Your generous mind, dear Mabel, is even more solicitous for others than for your own peace, but believe me, my dear, you will in due time receive your reward."

"Alas, Aunt Mary," returned the sorrowful niece, "what kind of reward can compensate one for the sudden appearance of a canker in the very heart of an accepted suitor? How can a poor girl place faith in *any* man, when compelled to withdraw it from one who was

deemed incapable of a dishonourable action ?"

"Mabel, dear," softly sounded the obsequious aunt, "you know, my dear, you never really loved Mr. Bond."

"But I regarded him as a noble specimen of the human race," was the emphatic reply.

"I'm quite aware of that, Mabel." Aunt Mary was now anxious to modify the effect of the mental poison she had administered. "On calmly considering the subject, Mabel, it's just possible that Mr. Bond may still appear the noble character you once supposed him to be ? You certainly have cause for a grave doubt on that point, but such doubt amounts only to suspicion, after all."

"That's *very* true. I've no positive proof of his guilt, have I, Aunt Mary ?"

said the niece, in a more cheerful tone. But the inspired hope of the lover's innocence was no sooner kindled than extinguished, and the mind of the speaker—like some dreary region after a lightning flash—appeared more gloomy than ever. "No, no; how can I possibly believe that man innocent, with everything before me, except positive proof, to justify an opposite conclusion? Impossible." Mabel paused to subdue her emotion, and then with increased firmness of purpose she closed the substance of her resolve. "The name of Charles Bond must be a thing of the past. I hope never again to hear it mentioned. But how—tell me, Aunt Mary—how, or in what way I can return his once beautiful, but now detestable presents?"

"On that subject, my dear, I will consult your papa in the morning," replied the aunt.

"There is one thing, Aunt Mary, and only one thing I shall be sorry to part with." Mabel here took a small but valuable brooch from the front of her dress, kissed it and placed it in the portfolio before her. "His dear mother, when on her death-bed, requested him to present that little gem to me, as her last token of affection. As such I have worn it ever since."

"And as a present from his mother you may surely retain and continue to wear it in remembrance of the giver," said Aunt Mary.

"I cannot—I dare not. Precious as it is, it must be returned with things that have ceased to have any value. It was conveyed to me by a hand that has now and for ever been rejected," resolutely declared the niece.

"Come, Mabel, come," soothingly en-

joined the aunt as she rose from her seat; "'tis time to retire, especially as we have several early calls to make in the morning."

"Ah, me!" sighed Mabel to herself, as she followed her aunt. "It's a sad thing for *anyone* to lose a mother and a mother's love, but it's still more unfortunate for one who has lived and still lives without knowing either."



CHAPTER XV.

ERNEST, THE WANDERER, IN DEVON.

THE fog thickens. The social mist of yesterday was a trifle compared with the impenetrable haze of to-day. Who can solve a mystery that becomes more and more mysterious? Not I. Yet the greater the difficulty the greater seems my desire to overcome it. In their rustic villa I last night spent a most delightful evening with Mr. and Mrs. Belman and their precious Pearl. I felt that if ever a young man was what is commonly called "over head and ears in love,"

such was the case of Ernest Stone. Yes: in presence of that irresistible charmer I said to myself, *Pearl must be my future bride, or I can never become a bridegroom.* Under this pleasing illusion I might have lived from year to year like one entranced by a beautiful dream. But alas! this morning has nearly, if not entirely, extinguished even that visionary hope. Just at the moment I called to pay my parting respects to the fair one, a grand carriage with liveried attendants drove up to the door. Into that carriage the mysterious Pearl entered, and after bestowing on me a silent smile—it seemed a *loving* smile—that electrified my entire system, she drove off with a gentleman of more than treble her own age. What's the object or meaning of this? On a former occasion the cautious guardian faintly foreshadowed the probable

future of his ward. He said, "*She may possibly be induced to marry some giddy noble for whom she has no real love.*" Can this be the nobleman alluded to? It hardly seems likely, yet unlikely things *do* occur in life. Many poor girls have ere now been educated to fill exalted stations, and who can say that such is not the case with the accomplished Pearl? Then what's to be done? Nothing. Yes: something *must* be done. Could the last parting smile be forgotten, I might manage, in time, to forget the smiler. As this cannot be, I must divert the mind from the subject by the only means in my power—rapid change of scene and society. If the Sentinel can be persuaded to place me in possession of a portion of the locked-up fortune, I'll be off for a while to some distant land. Meanwhile, and before I venture to submit

such a proposition, I must continue to discharge the duty he has imposed on me in my own country.

(*Letter* 5.)

"Exeter, August 1st.

"DEAR UNCLE,

"The Wanderer is a title now applied to me by absent friends. Should I, however, at the close of my wanderings be prompted by the strange notes in my private memorandum book to *write a novel*, the perfected or complete title shall be, '*The Wanderer, or travelling for an object by a young man in earnest*' (Ernest). But as there is something rather uncertain, if not very doubtful, about the attainment of the desired object, this flash of a fanciful imagination may be nothing more than a novel

idea after all. I will now turn from fiction to fact.

"Devonshire is a delightful county. I speak of the delight arising from a survey of its numerous and varied scenic beauties, and these on every side tend to charm the beholder. I will presently endeavour to justify the opinion by a brief account of my observations during a rapid run through the romantic north, and the less romantic, but equally beautiful, south of Devon.

"Exeter, or the 'Metropolis of the West,' as it is termed by modern writers, is worthy of the extensive and magnificent county of which it is the capital. But a vivid recollection of the chief attraction in Canterbury has perhaps deprived me of a just appreciation of minor English minsters. Yet nothing, I imagine, could be more artistic in conception, or elaborate in execution,

than the 'western front' of Exeter Cathedral.

"The walks in and around the city, and the views therefrom, are characteristic of the country in which such walks and views abound. They may be described in one word — *splendid!* Another and equally suitable word might have been applied, had it not been required for an object to be named in the next paragraph.

"Before my arrival in the county I had often heard of the Devonshire young ladies being, as a rule, considered *beautiful!* Were it possible for anything to exceed that designation, I might declare the reality to surpass the report. A stroll on that fine promenade termed the 'Nothernhay' when the city is in holiday attire would convince any one impressed in favour of woman's rights not only that members of the fair sex

in the west are in reality fair, but that by their exquisite taste in dress they display their fair features and genteel figures to the best advantage.

"But in dilating with native ardour on this attractive theme, I must remind you of the position—as a travelling observer—in which you have placed me. In reverting, therefore, to beauty in its most alluring form, I speak as a young man commissioned to study human nature from every point of view, whether such views may present a pleasing or an opposite aspect. To acquire proficiency in the art—so far as the *female* graces are concerned—may possibly require a longer period of time than will ever fall to *my* lot. Though not entirely disheartened, I am not greatly encouraged by the discovery that some old men—some *very* old men — have not yet completed

their studies on the subject of the fair sex, and that a 'pretty girl' has been known to attract the attention of grey beards, even at the age of three score years and ten.

"Having an important—important *to me*—question to submit at the close of this epistle, I will now with all haste direct my pen, as I previously directed my person, down the North Devon line; a line that passes through some of the finest scenery in the county. By a ride of forty miles down this line, I reached the clean, compact, and business-like looking town of

"BARNSTAPLE.

"But I begin to discover that, in one sense, a town is only a town after all, and that a description of each, beyond a passing note of any remarkable feature, would be something like an everlasting disserta-

tion on a Devonshire apple. Although apples, like towns, vary in size, in name, in complexion, and in character, apples and pears, like towns and villages—and I may add, like the townsmen and villagers, are a good deal like each other.

"For many of the recent improvements in Barnstaple the inhabitants are indebted to a native of the town—a wealthy merchant in London, named Rock. Among other liberal acts of this gentleman for the mental and physical benefit of residents, may be mentioned the purchase of an extensive tract of land and the formation thereon of a beautiful promenade by the river-side. Twelve miles beyond Barnstaple I reached the romantic little town of

"ILFRACOMBE.

"To any lover of natural beauties—beau-

ties unadorned or disfigured by artificial means—this is a charming region. It is impossible to behold and meditate on the rugged yet majestic projections of this romantic coast without being favourably impressed with what is presented to the vision by the remarkable sea-frontage of Ilfracombe. Here, in a variety of forms and sizes, are scenic pictures for those whose taste has been purified by that intellectual current that springs from the cultivated soil of noble intellects—a current that creates an appetite for all that can charm the imagination and enrich the understanding.

"Proceeding from one form of romantic grandeur to another, I now come to

"LYNTON AND LYNMOUTH.

"It would be impossible even for an artistic imagination to picture to the mind

of a stranger anything like the natural features of this twin region of marvels. If it be true that it is 'only one step from the sublime to the ridiculous,' I can think of nothing that would present so striking an illustration of that *single move* as the possibility of being able to step from the valley of rocks at Lynton to the jetty at Margate. The natural beauties of Lynmouth are equally beyond the power of typical description. Southey declares Lynmouth to be one of the finest spots he ever beheld. And surely that spot may itself be compared to some very great yet very modest poet—a poet who does not take his theme from objects moulded into form and gracefully robed by the skilful hand of art, but who sits silently confronting and studying nature in her unadorned and potent simplicity.

"Were it not for its beautiful winding river and noble bridge of four and twenty arches, there would be little of an attractive character in the quaint looking town of

"BIDEFORD,

with its narrow, steep and poverty-stricken streets. But a splendid view of the river Torridge, crossed by the bridge just alluded to, is the redeeming feature of the place.

"By a walk of three miles sea-ward from Bideford I reached that justly celebrated and enormous pile or ridge of pebbles thrown in from the ocean on a spot called

"NORTHAM BURROWS.

"The pebble ridge consists of boulders from one to forty or fifty pounds in weight, and the whole of this long and ponderous pile would appear to have been thrown up from the bowels of the ocean as an inland

defence or barrier against its own ravages. The sands are of great extent, and are as firm, level and smooth as a carpet. The leading feature of this spot—the monster pebble ridge—has been termed the 'eighth wonder of the world.' But as a stranger to the remaining seven, I cannot, of course, speak of this by *comparison.* At one end of this oceanic wonder stands—alone in its glory—the 'Westward Ho! Hotel.'

"Returning to Exeter, I will now proceed to furnish a few brief notes of my run down the South Devon line. The first tiny towns to call for remark are the popular little watering-places of

"DAWLISH AND TEIGNMOUTH.

"The former is twelve miles from Exeter, and the latter three miles beyond. The most remarkable thing I discovered in either was the decided *change*

of air from that I experienced in North Devon. There was a difference of a coat by day and a blanket at night. The bracing atmosphere of the north and the mild or relaxing tendency of that in the south would seem to confirm the declaration of Abernethy, who said that '*between the Isle of Skye and Land's End any climate may be obtained, except a tropical one.*'

"A little farther down the line—by a branch from Newton Junction—I reached the more imposing and fashionable town of

"TORQUAY.

"This popular watering-place is twenty-six miles from Exeter, and about midway between that city and Plymouth.

"A word or two on *local* guide books. If these are always to be regarded as reliable sources of information, any wanderer

might encounter a difficulty in the form of a problem which I confess to be beyond my power to solve. Each local guide declares its own watering-place to be superior to every other place. A modest mode of making this declaration is furnished in a little book, from which I take the following rather novel style of recommendation :—

"'Many persons go to the South of France, to Italy, or to Madeira *to die.* Let those who are on the eve of following in their footsteps reverse their decision, and go to Torquay *to live!*'

"After this you will, I think, admit that another word on the superior advantages of such a place will be unnecessary. Yet I am prompted to add that a vast number of persons *do* go to Torquay to live. Proof of this is evident by the numerous

terraces and villas which meet the eye in every direction, while the walks and drives in the vicinity bear each and all a brilliant impress of the real Devonshire form, and the sea-ward views are in keeping with the inland attractions. I now come to

"PLYMOUTH AND DEVONPORT.

"Plymouth, of the two, is by far the larger and more important place, both in a commercial and pleasurable point of view. Devonport is the more important of the two, in a naval aspect, on account of its vast arsenal, &c. The towns are in close proximity, and may be said to join each other, being divided only by an inlet of Plymouth Sound, and by a long sheet and sidings termed Stonehouse.

"The Plymouth Breakwater throws that of Portland entirely into the shade. I

speak in reference to magnitude, cost, and time occupied in the construction. It was commenced in 1812, and it appears that 200 men were daily employed on it during a period of thirty-four years, and that about 4,000,000 tons of granite were used, at a cost of £1,582,000.

"Mount Edgcumbe, with its pleasure-grounds, its winding walks and charming views, is one of the most lovely spots to be found *even in Devonshire.* What more can be said in its favour?—*nothing.*

"In bringing my notes on the charming county of Devon to a close, I must not omit—as a little drawback to its scenic attractions—to say that the mental deformities of *ignorance* and *superstition* among the poor of some of the rural districts would be very *laughable*, if their existence in the nineteenth century could be regarded as

other than *deplorable.* Without positive evidence of the fact I should have been inclined to question the extent to which people's minds, or their houses, are still haunted by those mysterious impostors, the 'hobgoblins.' On one occasion I was seriously assured that nobody would live in a large house near a certain village, because the premises were not only haunted, but that the ghost usually took all the best fruit and vegetables from the garden. After this assurance I arrived at the conclusion that the spirit of the last witches executed in England—two old women burnt to death in North Devon—had not been entirely extinguished in the vicinity of their execution. Yet the Wanderer's review of Devon resolves itself into a single question: Is there any county in the United Kingdom in which the people are entirely free from

mental imperfections? If so, to that region the rising generation should be sent to school. But until that desirable spot has been discovered I shall have no objection, in return for my attachment to the varied beauties of the west, to accept as a compliment that popular term of reproach which conceited Cockneys, in their superior wisdom, so often apply to any supposed *ignoramus* in the form of a

"DEVONSHIRE DUMPLING.

"Colonel Stone, C.B.

"P.S.—The postscript to a letter, like the codicil to a will, is often of special interest to any one immediately concerned. Even so now. To *me* the question I am about to submit for your consideration is one of vital import. You have commissioned me to obtain a 'Knowledge of the

World,' and an old soldier like yourself will hardly require to be reminded that the world extends a little beyond the borders of the United Kingdom. I wish to leave England for a while, but not—no, not for ever, unless I should happen to become food either for the sharks or the cannibals. Unlike my brother Ruby I am not an accomplished linguist, and I will simply ask permission to visit a few of our distant colonial possessions in which the English language and Englishmen — I presume Englishwomen too — are to be found. Should the desire be granted, the concession will no doubt be accompanied by a *liberal* grant of *another* kind. While waiting your reply there are one or two spots I shall be anxious to visit, and to these I will hasten with all the speed attainable by express trains. But let me observe, *en*

passant, that I always travel with an insurance ticket for £1,000. In case of accident this ticket will be found within a small pocket in the lining of that part of my waistcoat facing the heart. You may possibly say, 'What's the object?' especially as I am not blessed, or *otherwise*, with poor relations. My answer would be that orphans are not *all* rich, and in the event of some railway company sending me to my account 'with all my imperfections on my head,' you will please to hand the insurance money to my sister, who will know how to dispose of the same without the testator's will, yet agreeably with the wishes of

"E. S."

END OF VOL. I.

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